

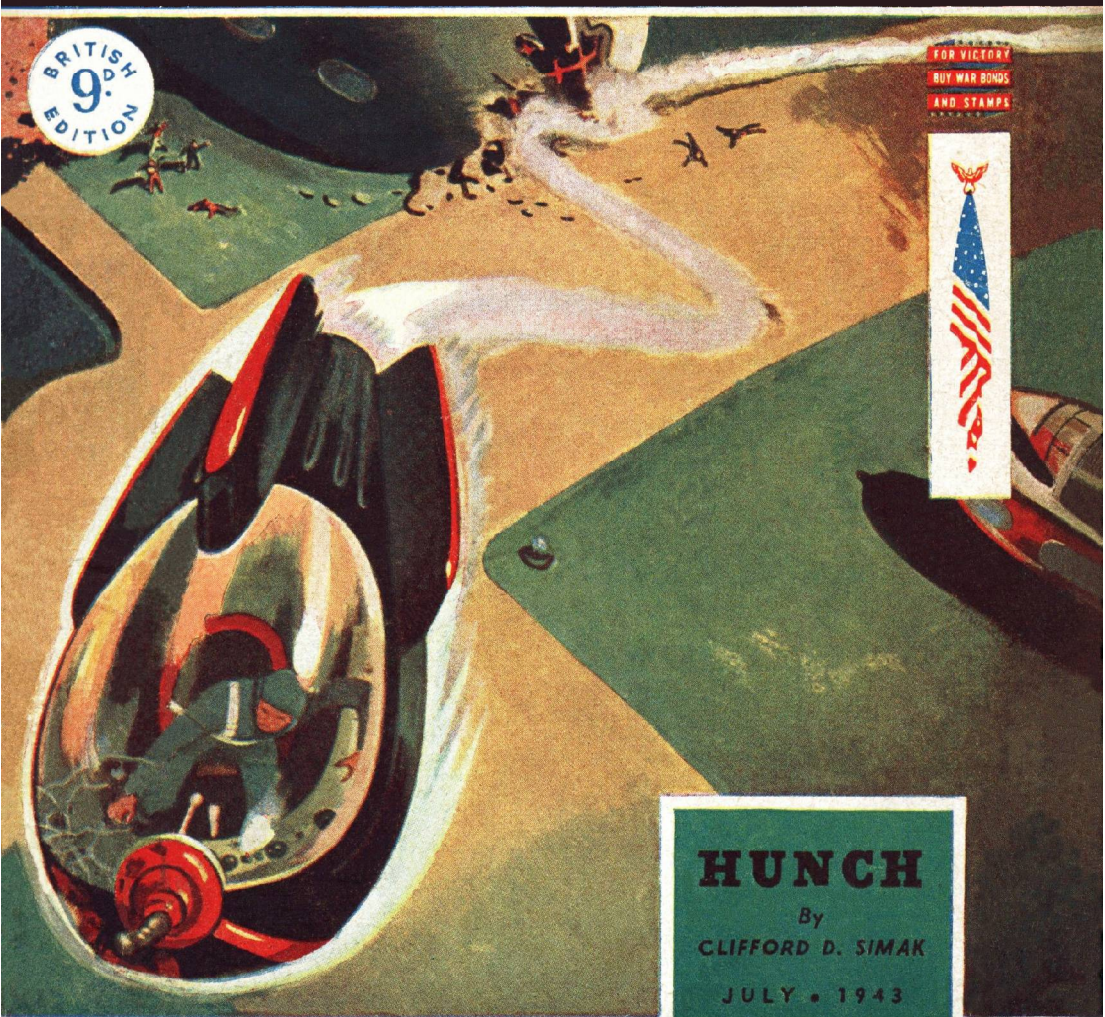
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HUNCH

By
CLIFFORD D. SIMAK

JULY • 1943

A STREET AND SMITH PUBLICATION

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Holder of the title: "The World's Most Perfectly Developed Man."

NOTE:

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— Charles Atlas

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JULY 1943

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All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

Hunch

By Clifford D. Simak

The invading beings were very old—and marvelously subtle, for man had no sense to perceive them. Save—hunches. Hunches, and a blind man who saw through alien eyes.

HANNIBAL was daydreaming again and Spencer Chambers wished he'd stop. Chambers, as chairman of the Solar Control Board, had plenty of things to worry about without having his mind cluttered up with the mental pictures Hannibal kept running through his brain. But, Chambers knew, there was nothing he could do about it. Daydreaming was one of Hannibal's habits, and since Chambers needed the spidery little entity, he must put up with it as best he could.

If those mental pictures hadn't been so clear, it wouldn't have been so bad, but since Hannibal was the kind of thing he was they couldn't be anything but clear.

Chambers recognized the place Hannibal was remembering. It wasn't the first time Hannibal had remembered it and this time, as always, it held a haunting tinge of nostalgia. A vast green valley, dotted with red boulders splotted with gray lichens, and on either side of the valley towering mountain peaks that reached spear-point fingers toward a bright-blue sky.

Chambers, seeing the valley exactly as Hannibal saw it, had the uncomfortable feeling that he knew it, too—that in the next instant he could say its name, could give its exact location. He had felt that way before, when the identification of the place, just as now, seemed at his fingertips. Perhaps it was just an emotional hallucination brought about by Hannibal's frequent thinking of the place, by the roseate longing with which he invested it. Of that, however, Chambers could not be sure. At times he would have sworn the feeling was from his own brain, a feeling of his own, set apart and distinct from Hannibal's daydreams.

At one time that green valley might have been Hannibal's home, although it seemed unlikely. Hannibal had been found in the Asteroid Belt, to this day remained the only

one of his species to be discovered. And that valley never could have been in the Asteroids, for the Belt had no green valleys, no blue skies.

Chambers would have liked to question Hannibal, but there was no way to question him—no way to put abstract thoughts into words or into symbols Hannibal might understand. Visual communication the picturing of actualities, yes—but not an abstract thought. Probably the very idea of direct communication of ideas, in the human sense, was foreign to Hannibal. After months of association with the outlandish little fellow, Chambers was beginning to believe so.

The room was dark except for the pool of light cast upon the desk top by the single lamp. Through the tall windows shone the stars and a silvery sheen that was the rising moon gilding the tops of the pines on the nearby ridge.

But darkness and night meant nothing to either Chambers or Hannibal. For Hannibal could see in the dark, Chambers could not see at all. Spencer Chambers was blind.

And yet, he saw, through the eyes—or, rather, the senses of Hannibal. Saw far plainer and more clearly than if he had seen with his own eyes. For Hannibal saw differently than a man sees—much differently, and better.

That is, except when he was daydreaming.

The daydream faded suddenly and Chambers, brain attuned to Hannibal's sensory vibrations, looked through and beyond the walls of his office into the reception room. A man had entered, was hanging up his coat, chatting with Chambers' secretary.

Chambers' lips compressed into straight, tight lines as he watched. Wrinkles creased his forehead and his analytical brain coldly

classified and indexed once again the situation which he faced.

Moses Allen, he knew, was a good man, but in this particular problem he had made little progress—perhaps would make little progress, for it was something to which there seemed, at the moment, no answer.

As Chambers watched Allen stride across the reception room his lips relaxed a bit and he grinned to himself, wondering what Allen would think if he knew he was being spied upon. Moses Allen, head of the Solar Secret Service, being spied upon!

No one, not even Allen, knew the full extent of Hannibal's powers of sight. There was no reason, Chambers realized, to have kept it secret. It was just one of his eccentricities, he admitted. A little thing from which he gained a small, smug satisfaction—a bit of knowledge that he, a blind man, hugged close to himself.

Inside the office, Allen sat down in a chair in front of Chambers' desk, lit a cigarette.

"What is it this time, chief?" he asked.

Chambers seemed to stare at Allen, his dark glasses like bowls of blackness against his thin pale face. His voice was crisp, his words clipped short.

"The situation is getting worse, Moses. I'm discontinuing the station on Jupiter."

Allen whistled. "You'd counted a lot on that station."

"I had," Chambers acknowledged. "Under the alien conditions such as exist on that planet I had hoped we might develop a new chemistry, discover a new pharmacopoeia. A drug, perhaps, that would turn the trick. Some new chemical fact or combination. It was just a shot in the dark."

"We've taken a lot of them," said Allen. "We're just about down to a point where we have to play our hunches. We haven't much else left to play."

Chambers went on, almost as if Allen hadn't spoken. "The relief ship to Jupiter came back today. Brought back one man, mind entirely gone. The rest were dead. One of them had cut his throat. The relief men came back, too. Refused to stay after what they saw."

Allen grimaced. "Can't say I blame them."

"Those men were perfectly sane when they went out," declared Chambers. "Psychologists gave every one of them high ratings for mental stability. They were selected on that very point, because we

realized Jupiter is bad—probably the most alien place in the entire Solar System. But not so bad every one of them would go mad in three short months."

Chambers matched his fingers. "The psychologists agree with me on that point."

Hannibal stirred a little, sharp claws scratching the desk top. Allen reached out a hand and chucked the little creature under the chin. Hannibal swiped angrily at the hand with an armored claw.

"I'm getting desperate, Moses," Chambers said.

"I know," said Allen. "Things getting worse all the time. Bad news from every corner of the Solar System. Communications breaking down. Machines standing idle. Vital installations no good because the men crack up when they try to run them."

They sat in silence, Allen scowling at his cigarette, Chambers stiff and straight behind his desk, almost as if he were sitting on the edge of his chair, waiting for something to happen.

"Situational psychoneurosis," said Allen. "That's what the experts call it. Another sixty-four-dollar word for plain insanity. Men walking out on their jobs. Men going berserk. The whole Solar System crumbling because they can't do the jobs they're meant to do."

Chambers spoke sharply. "We can't get anywhere by ranting at it, Moses. We have to find the answer or give up. Give up the dream men held before us. The dream of an integrated Solar System, integrated by men and for men, working smoothly, making the life of the human race a better life."

"You mean," said Allen, slowly, "what have I done about it?"

Chambers nodded. "I had that in mind, yes."

"I have been working on a lot of angles," Allen declared. "Canceling out most of them. Really just one big one left. But you won't find the answer in sabotage. Not that I won't work to find it there. Because, you see, that's my business. But I feel in my bones that this really is on the up and up—would know it was, except for one thing. To solve this problem, we have to find a new factor in the human mind, in human psychology—a new approach to the whole problem itself.

"Geniuses is our trouble. It takes geniuses to run a Solar System. Just ordi-

nary intelligence isn't enough to do the job. And geniuses are screwy. You can't depend on them."

"And yet," said Spencer Chambers, almost angrily, "we must depend on them."

And that, Allen knew, was the truth—the bitter truth.

For years now there had been a breakdown of human efficiency. It had started gradually, a few incidents here, a few there. But it had spread, had progressed almost geometrically; had reached a point now where, unless something could be done about it, the Solar System's economic and industrial fabric would go to pot for lack of men to run it and the power plants and laboratories, the mills, the domed cities, the communication system men had built on all the planets encircling the Sun would crumble into dust.

Men were better trained, better equipped mentally, more brilliant than ever before. Of that there was no question. They had to be. Hundreds of jobs demanded geniuses. And there were geniuses, thousands of them, more than ever before. Trouble was they didn't stay geniuses. They went insane.

There had been evidence of a mass insanity trend as far back as the twentieth century, stemming even then from the greater demands which an increasingly complex, rapidly changing, vastly speeded-up civilization placed upon the human brain, upon human capabilities and skills. With the development of a scientific age, man suddenly had been called upon to become a mental giant. Man had tried, had in part succeeded. But the pace had been too fast—the work of man had outstripped his brain. Now man was losing out.

Today the world was a world of specialization. To be of economic value, men had to specialize. They had to study harder than ever to fit themselves into their world. College courses were tougher and longer. The very task of educating themselves for a place in their civilization placed upon them a nervous tension that was only intensified when they took over the strenuous, brain-wearing workaday tasks to which they were assigned.

No wonder, Allen told himself, that there came a time when they threw up their hands, walked out, didn't give a damn.

"You've got to find out what's wrong with the bright boys," he said. "You have to find what's in their make-up that makes them unstable. Maybe there's something

wrong with their education, with the way it's dished out to them. Maybe—"

"The educators and psychologists are conducting research along those lines," Chambers reminded him, shortly.

"I get it," said Allen. "I'm to stick to my own field. All right, then. I'm going to tell you something that will make you madder than hell."

Chambers sat silent, waiting. Hannibal shifted himself along the desk, edging closer to Allen, almost as if he were listening and didn't want to miss a word.

"It's this Sanctuary business," Allen said. "You've seen the ads—"

He stopped in flustered embarrassment, but Chambers nodded.

"I see them, yes. I read the papers, Moses. I spread them out and Hannibal looks at them and I read them, just as well as you do. You needn't be so sensitive about my blindness."

"Sanctuary has those ads plastered all over the place," said Allen. "In papers, on signboards, everywhere. Sometimes they call themselves a rest home, sometimes a sanitarium. Sometimes they don't even bother to call themselves anything. Just use a lot of white space, with the name 'Sanctuary' in big type. Refined, all of it. Nothing crude, Nothing quackish about it. They've run about all the other mental sanitariums out of business. Nobody thinks of going anywhere but Sanctuary when they go batty now."

"What are you getting at?" snapped Chambers.

"I told you it would make you sore," Allen reminded him. "They've fooled you, just like they've fooled all the rest of us. Let me tell you what I know about them."

Chambers' lips were thin and straight. "Whatever made you investigate them, Moses? Sanctuary is—" He faltered. "Why, Sanctuary is—"

Allen laughed. "Yes, I know what you mean. Sanctuary is lily-white, Sanctuary is noble. It's a shining haven in a world that's going haywire. Yeah, that's what you think and everyone thinks. I thought so myself. I started looking them up on a hunch. I hated myself. I felt like I ought to go and hide. But I had a hunch, see, and I never pass one up. So I gritted my teeth and went ahead. And I'm convinced that Sanctuary is either the greatest racket the Solar System has ever known or it's tied up with this insanity some way. My best

guess is that it's a racket. I can't figure any angles the other way except that maybe they're doing something to drive people nuts just to boost their business and that doesn't add up for a lot of reasons. If it's a racket, I'm wasting my time. There's bigger game to hunt than rackets these days."

He took a deep breath. "First I checked up on Dr. Jan Nichols, he's the fellow that runs it. And he's a nobody, far as I can find out. Certainly not a psychiatrist. Was in the Solar Service at one time. Headed a party making a survey of mineral resources out in the Belt. Had a minor degree in mineralogy. Just that, nothing more, no specialization. An opportunist, I would deduce. Took just enough education to get a job.

"Our records show the whole party dropped out of sight. Listed as lost. All the rest of them still are lost so far as anybody knows.

"I tried to get in touch with Nichols and couldn't do it. There's no way to reach him. No mail service. No radio service. Nothing. Sanctuary is isolated. If you want anything there, you go there personally, yourself."

"I hadn't realized that," said Chambers. "Neither does anyone else," declared Allen. "No one tries to get in touch with Sanctuary unless they need their services and if they need their services they go there. But you haven't heard the half of it."

Allen lit a cigarette. A clock chimed softly in the room, and Hannibal, leaning out from the desk, took a swipe at Allen, missed him by bare inches.

The Secret Service man leaned back in his chair. "So, since I couldn't get in touch with Nichols, I sent some of my men out to Sanctuary. Six of them, in fact, at different times—"

He looked at Chambers, face grim.

"They didn't come back."

Chambers started slightly. "They didn't come back. You mean—"

"I mean just that. They didn't come back. I sent them out. Then nothing happened. No word from them. No word of them. They simply disappeared. That was three months ago."

"It seems incredible," declared Chambers. "Never for a moment have we worried about curing or caring for the men who went insane. Sanctuary did that, we thought. Better than anyone else could."

He shot a sudden question. "They do cure them, don't they?"

"Certainly," said Allen. "Certainly, they cure them. I've talked with many they have cured. But those they cure never go back into Solar Service. They are—"

He wrinkled his brow. "It's hard to put into words, chief. They seem to be different people. Their behavior patterns don't check against their former records. They have forgotten most of their former skills and knowledge. They aren't interested in things they were interested in before. They have a funny look in their eyes. They—"

Chambers waved a hand. "You have to realize they would be changed. The treatment might—"

"Yes, I know," interrupted Allen. "Your reaction is just the same as mine was—as everyone else's would be. It's instinctive to protect Sanctuary, to offer apology for it. Because, you see, every last one of us, some day may need to go there. And knowing that it's there, we feel reassured. Maybe we go batty. So what? Sanctuary will fix us up O.K. Won't cost us a cent if we haven't got the money. Even free transportation if we haven't got the fare. It's something to anchor to in this mad world. A sort of faith, even. It's tough to have it knocked from under you."

Chambers shook his head. "I'm almost sorry you started this business, Moses."

Allen rose, smashed out his cigarette in a tray.

"I was afraid you'd be. I hate to drop it now I've gone this far. It may fizzle out, but—"

"No," said Chambers, "don't drop it. We can't afford to drop anything these days. You, yourself, feel almost instinctively, that it will come to nothing, but on the outside chance it may not, you must go ahead."

"There's just one thing more, chief," said Allen. "I've mentioned it before. The people—"

Chambers flipped impatient hands. "I know what you're going to say, Moses. They resent me. They think I've drawn away from them. There have been too many rumors."

"They don't know you're blind," said Allen. "They'd understand if they did know that. Better for them to know the truth than to think all the things they're thinking. I know what they're thinking. It's my business to know."

"Who would follow a blind man?" asked Chambers bitterly. "I'd gain their pity, lose their respect."

"They're baffled," said Allen. "They talk

about your illness, say it has changed you, never realizing it left you blind. They even say your brain is going soft. They wonder about Hannibal, ask why you never are without him. Fantastic tales have grown up about him. Even more fantastic than the truth."

"Moses," said Chambers, sharply, "we will talk no more about this."

He sat stiff and straight in his chair, staring straight ahead, as Allen left.

Mrs. Templefinger's parties always were dull. That was a special privilege she held as society leader of New York's upper crust.

This party was no exception. The amateurish, three-dimensional movies of her trip to the Jovian moons had been bad enough, but the violinist was worse.

Cabot Bond, publisher of the *Morning Spaceways*, fidgeted in his chair, then suddenly relaxed and tried to look at ease as he caught Mrs. Templefinger glaring at him. She might be a snooty old dame, he told himself, and a trial to all her friends with her determined efforts to uphold the dignity of one of the Solar System's greatest family, but it definitely was not policy to vex her. She controlled too many advertising accounts.

Cabot Bond knew about advertising accounts. He lived by them and for them. And he worried about them. He was worrying about one of them now.

The violin wailed to a stop and the guests applauded politely. The violinist bowed condescendingly. Mrs. Templefinger beamed, fingering her famous rope of Asteroid jewels so the gems caught light and gleamed with slow ripples of alien fire.

The man next to Bond leaned close.

"Great story that—about discovering the Rosetta stone of Mars," he said. "Liked the way your paper handled it. Lots of background. Interpretative writing. None of the sensationalism some of the other papers used. And you put it on the front page, too. The *Rocket* stuck it away on an inside page."

Bond wriggled uncomfortably. That particular story he'd just as soon forget. At least he didn't want to talk about it. But the man apparently expected an answer.

"It wasn't a stone," Bond said icily, almost wishing the violin would start up again. "It was a scroll."

"Greatest story of the century," said the man, entirely unabashed. "Why, it will open up all the ancient knowledge of Mars."

The violin shrieked violently as the musician sawed a vicious bow across the strings.

Bond settled back into his chair, returned to his worry once again.

Funny how Sanctuary, Inc., had reacted to that story about the Rosetta scroll of Mars. Almost as if they had been afraid to let it come before the public eye. Almost, although this seemed ridiculous, as if they might have been afraid of something that might be found in some old Martian record.

Perhaps he had been wrong in refusing their request to play the story down. Some of the other papers, like the *Rocket*, apparently had agreed. Others hadn't, of course, but most of those were sheets which never had carried heavy Sanctuary lineage, didn't stand to lose much. *Spaceway* did carry a lot of lineage. And it worried Bond.

The violin was racing now, a flurry of high-pitched notes, weaving a barbaric, outlandish pattern—a song of outer space, of cold winds on strange planets, of alien lands beneath unknown stars.

Mrs. Templefinger's sudden scream rang through the room, cutting across the shrilling of the music.

"My jewels!" she screamed. "My jewels!"

She had surged to her feet, one hand clutching the slender chain that encircled her throat. The chain on which the Asteroid jewels had been strung.

But now the famous jewels were gone, as if some hand of magic had stripped them from the chain and whisked them into nowhere.

The violinist stood motionless, bow poised, fingers hovering over the strings. A glass tinkled as it slipped from someone's fingers and struck the floor.

"They're gone!" shrieked Mrs. Templefinger. "My jewels are gone!"

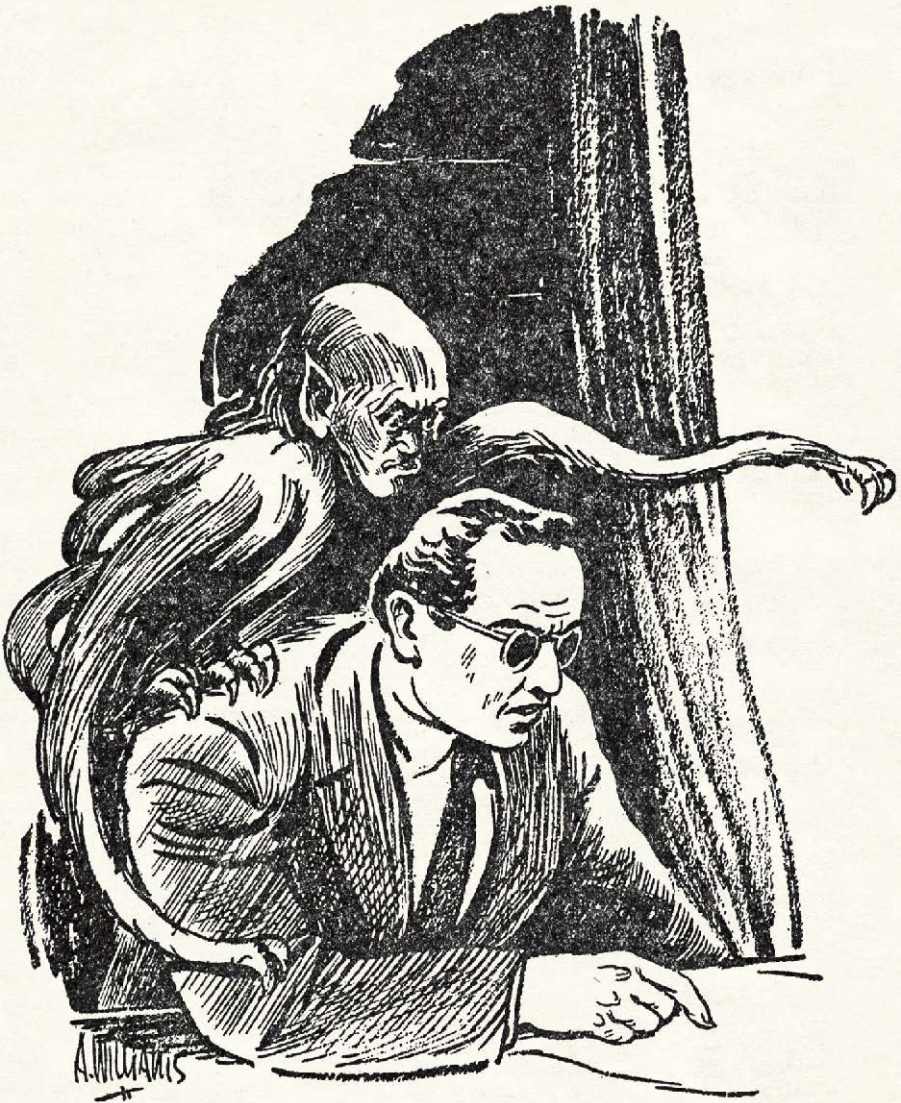
The butler padded forward silently.

"Perhaps I should call the police, madam," he offered respectfully.

A strange light came over Mrs. Templefinger's face, a soft and human light that smoothed out the lines around her eyes and suddenly made her soft and gracious instead of a glowering old dowager. For the first time in twenty years, Mrs. Templefinger smiled a gracious smile.

"No, Jacques," she whispered. "Not the police."

Still smiling, she sat down again, nodded to the violinist. The chain fell from her fingers, almost as if she had forgotten the



jewels, almost as if a cool half million dollars' worth of jewelry didn't matter.

The violinist swept the bow across the strings again.

Cabot Bond rose and tiptoed softly from the room. Suddenly it had occurred to him there was something he must do—phone his editor, tell him to play down any more stories the wires might carry on the Rosetta scroll of Mars.

Harrison Kemp, head of the Solar Research Bureau on Pluto, straightened from

the microscope, expelling his breath slowly.

His voice was husky with excitement. "Johnny, I really believe you've got it! After all these years . . . after—"

He stopped and stared, a stricken stare.

For Johnny Gardner had not heard him. Was not even looking at him. The man sat hunched on his stool, faint starlight from the laboratory port falling across his face, a face that had suddenly relaxed, hung loose and slack, a tired, wan face with haggard eyes and drooping jowls.

Kemp tried to speak, but his lips were

dry and his tongue thick and terror dried up his words before they came. From somewhere back of him came the slow *drip-drip* of precious water. Outside the black spires of Plutonian granite speared up into the inky, starry sky.

And before the port, the hunched figure of a man whose gaze went out into the alien wilderness, yet did not see the jumbled tangle that was Pluto's surface.

"Johnny!" Kemp whispered, and the whisper frightened him as it seemed to scamper like a frightened rat around the room.

Gardner did not answer, did not move. One hand lay loosely in his lap, the other dangled at his side. One foot slipped off the rung of the stool and, just failing to reach the floor, swung slowly to and fro like a ghastly pendulum.

Kemp took a step forward, reaching out a hand that stopped short of Gardner's shoulder.

There was no use, he knew, of trying to do anything. Johnny Gardner was gone. The hulking body still sat on the stool, but the mind, that keen, clear-cut, knifelike mind, was gone. Gone like a dusty mummy falling in upon itself. One moment a mind that could probe to the very depth of life itself—the next moment a mind that was no more than a darkening cavern filled with the hollow hooting of already half-forgotten knowledge.

Fumbling in the darkness, Kemp found another stool, perched wearily on it. Perched and stared at Gardner, while he felt the nameless horror of an alien planet and an alien happening slowly circle over him, like dark wings beating in the starlight.

A small cone of brilliance hung above the workbench, lighting up the electronic microscope. And under the microscope, Kemp knew, was something that came close to being the raw material, the constituent element of life. Something that he and Johnny Gardner and Victor Findlay had sought—for how many years? To Kemp, sitting there in the darkness, it seemed eternity.

An eternity of research, of compiling notes, of seeming triumph, always followed by the blackest of defeat.

"And," said Harrison Kemp, speaking to himself and the silent room and the madman at the port, "here we are again!"

It would be futile, Kemp knew, to try to pick up where Gardner had left off. For

Gardner had worked swiftly, had been forced to work swiftly, in those last few minutes. Since there had been no time to jot it down, he had tucked away that final crucial data in his brain. Even under the near-zero conditions to which the protoplasmic molecules had been subjected, they still would be unstable. They would have changed now, would have been rendered useless for further observation—would either have become more complex life or no life at all, having lost that tiny spark that set them off from other molecules.

Kemp knew he and Findlay would have to start over again. Johnny's notes would help them to a certain point—up to that point where he had ceased to write them down, had stored them in his brain. From that point onward they would have to go alone, have to feel their way along the path Johnny Gardner had taken, try to duplicate what he had done. For whatever was in Johnny's brain was lost now—lost completely, gone like a whiff of rocket gas hurled into the maw of space.

A door creaked open and Kemp got to his feet, turning slowly to face the man silhouetted against the light from the room beyond.

"Why so quiet?" asked Findlay. "What are you fellows—"

His voice ran down and stopped. He stood rigidly, staring at the star-lighted face of Johnny Gardner.

"It just happened, Vic," said Kemp. "He called me to show me something in the 'scope and while I looked it happened to him. When I looked up again and spoke to him, he was sitting there, just like he is now. He was all right before, just a few seconds before."

"It hits them like that," said Findlay. He stepped into the room, walked close to Kemp. "We should know," he said. "We've seen it happen to enough of them, you and I. Sometimes I have a dream, with you and me the only sane men left in the entire System. Everybody cracking, leaving just the two of us."

"I should have taken your advice," Kemp declared bitterly. "I should have sent him back on the last ship. But he looked all right. He acted O.K. And we needed him. He hung out for a long time. I thought maybe he would last."

"Don't blame yourself, chief," said Findlay. "There was no way for you to know."

"But you knew Vic! You warned me. You said he'd crack. How did you know? Tell me, how did—"

"Take it easy," cautioned Findlay. "I didn't know. Nothing definite, at least. Just a feeling I had. A hunch, I guess you'd call it."

They stood together, shoulder to shoulder, as if by standing thus they might beat back the sense of doom, the air of utter human futility that seemed to well within themselves.

"It won't always be like this," said Kemp. "Some day we'll be able to keep men's minds from going haywire. We'll find a way to help the mind keep pace with man's ambitions, to fall in step with progress."

Findlay nodded toward Gardner. "He was on the right track. He took the first long step. Before we even try to study the mind as it should be studied, scientifically, we must know what life is. Before we've always started in the middle and stumbled back, trying to find the Lord knows what. We can't afford to do that any longer. We have to have a basis, a basic understanding of life to understand ourselves."

Kemp nodded. "You're right, Vic. He took the first long step. And now . . . now, he goes to Sanctuary."

They helped Johnny Gardner from the stool and across the room. He walked like a blind man, stumblingly, muscles uncertain. His eyes stared straight ahead, as if he were watching something no one else could see.

"Thank heaven," said Findlay, "he went this way. Not like Smith."

Kemp shuddered, remembering. Smith had been violent. He had mouthed obscenities, had screamed and shouted, wrecked the laboratory. They had tried to calm him, to reason with him. When he charged Findlay with a steel bar, Kemp had shot him.

Although even that hadn't been any worse than Lempke. Lempke had committed suicide by walking out of the dome into the almost nonexistent atmosphere of frigid Pluto without benefit of space gear.

Dr. Daniel Monk laid the pencil aside, read once again the laborious lines of translation:

This is the story of . . . who visited the fifth planet from the central sun; not the first to go there, but the first to discover the life that lived thereon, a curious form of life that because of its . . . had not previously been recognized as life—

Outside the thin night wind of Mars had risen and was sweeping the city of Sandebar, whining and moaning among the cornices and columns of the museum. Drift sand pecked with tiny fingers against the windows and the brilliant Martian starlight painted frosty squares on the floor as it came tumbling through the casement.

This is the story of—

Dr. Monk frowned at that. The story of whom? Probably, he told himself, he would never know, for the vocabulary made available by the Rosetta scroll did not extend to personal names.

With a wry smile he picked up his pencil again, wrote "John Doe" in the blank. That was as good as any name.

This is the story of John Doe—

But that didn't answer another question. It didn't tell why the life of the fifth planet had not been recognized as life.

The fifth planet, without a doubt, was that planet which in another æon had traveled an orbit between Mars and Jupiter—the planet now represented by the Asteroid Belt, a maelstrom of planetary debris. It would have been the planet, it and the Earth, most accessible to Mars. It was natural the Martians should have gone there. And that they had known the planet before its disruption gave a breath-taking clue to the incredible antiquity of the scroll from which the passage had been translated.

Perhaps, Monk told himself, one of the other scrolls might tell of the actual breakup of the fifth planet, might give a clue or state of cause for its destruction. There were thousands of other scrolls, the loot of years from the ruins of Martian cities. But until this moment they had been voiceless, mute testimony the Martians had possessed a written language, but telling nothing of that language, revealing none of the vast store of information they held.

A curious form of life that because of its—

Because of its what? What form could life take, what trick could it devise to hide its being? Invisibility? Some variant of protective coloration? But one couldn't write "invisibility" into the text as one had written "John Doe."

Perhaps some day, Monk told himself, he might find the answer, might be able to write in that missing word. But not now. Not yet. The Rosetta scroll, for all its importance, still left much to be desired. It necessarily had to leave much to be desired,

for it dealt in a language that sprang from a different source than Terrestrial language, developed along alien lines, represented thought processes that could have been—must have been—poles apart from the thoughts of Earth.

All that the Martian language held in common with Earthian language was that both represented thought symbols. That was all; there was very little similarity in the way they went about doing that same thing.

Monk reached out and lifted the heavy metal cylinder from the desk before him. Carefully, almost reverentially, he flipped open the lock that released one end of the cylinder, drew out the heavy, lengthy scroll that had provided the key to the thoughts, the works, the ways of the ancient race of Mars.

He unrolled it slowly, gently, squinting at the faded characters, faint with a million years or more of being buried in the sands of Mars.

A dictionary once—a dictionary again, but in a different way.

Monk wondered what sort of a long-dead personality had penned that dictionary. Scholar, seeking no more than the ways of truth? Businessman, seeking to facilitate a better lingual understanding, therefore a better commercial understanding, between the race of Mars and the now decadent races of the Jovian moons? Statesmen, trying to bring about a good-neighbor policy?

The Martian, however, whoever he might have been, had not understood that Jovian language too well, for some of the words and idioms didn't check with the Jovian language as Earthmen knew it. Or it might have been that the language itself had changed. Perhaps in that long-gone day when the scroll was written the moon men of Jupiter had not been decadent.

On that point, Monk knew, the Jovians themselves could throw little light. There were ruins, of course, and legends, but the legends were utterly crazy and the ruins held no traditional sentiment for the tribes of Europa or Ganymede. Unlike most peoples, they held no racial memories of a more glorious past, of a forgotten golden age.

It was a roundabout way, a long way, an awkward way to read the language of Mars, Monk reflected. Martian to Jovian to Earthian. But it was better than no way at all.

The clock on the manuscript cabinet chimed briefly, apologetically. Monk glanced

at it and started in surprise. Midnight. He had not realized it was that late. Suddenly he knew that he was tired and hungry, needed a drink and smoke.

He rose and walked to a table, found a bottle and glass, poured himself a drink. From somewhere, far in another part of the vast building, came the ghostly sound of a watchman's tread, making his rounds. The sand talked and hissed against the window.

Back at his desk, Monk sipped at his drink, staring at the metallic tube, thinking of the faint scrawlings on the scroll inside.

A Rosetta stone—the Rosetta stone of Mars. Brought in off the desert by a man who might just as easily have passed it by. Uncovered by shifting sand that in the next hour might just as well have covered it again for all eternity.

Monk lifted his glass to the weathered cylinder:

"To destiny," he said, and drank before he realized how silly it sounded.

Or was it silly? Might there not really be such a thing as destiny? An actual force moving to offset the haphazard course of a vagrant universe? Sometimes it seemed so. Sometimes—

Monk emptied the glass, set it on the desk, dug into his pocket for cigarettes. His fingers closed on a small package and he drew it out wonderingly, brow wrinkled. Then, quickly, he remembered. It had been in his mail box that morning. He had meant to open it later, had forgotten it until now.

He examined it curiously. It bore no return address and his own was laboriously printed by hand. He ripped the fastening tapes with his fingernails, unwrapped the paper.

A jewel box! Monk snapped up the lid and stiffened in surprise.

In its bed of rich velvet lay the gleaming roundness of an Asteroid jewel. It glowed softly under the desk lamp, colors flowing and changing within its heart, almost as if the jewel itself might be in motion.

There was no card. Nothing to indicate who had sent the jewel or, more important, why it had been sent. Asteroid jewels, Monk knew, weren't something to be just sent around to anyone for no reason at all. The stone before him, he realized, had a value that ran close to five figures.

Almost fearfully, he lifted the gem between thumb and forefinger, held it to the light and caught his breath in wonder as it blazed with soul-stirring beauty.

With a feeling that approached awe, he replaced it, sat quietly in his chair watching it.

Queer things, the Asteroid jewels, queer in more ways than one.

No one knew just what they were. No Asteroid jewel ever had been analyzed. Spectrographically, they were like nothing science had ever known. They could be broken down chemically, of course, but even then they were impossible of analysis. Something there to analyze, naturally, but with certain baffling characteristics no chemist had yet been able to tie down and catalogue.

Found nowhere else in the Solar System, they were the magic that drove men to lives of bitter privation in the Belt, searching among the debris of a dead planet for that tiny gleam in the jumbled rocks that would spell riches. Most of them, as could be expected, died without ever finding a single jewel; died in one of the vast variety of horrible, lonely ways a man can die among the Asteroids.

Monk found a cigarette and lighted it, listening to the pelting of the sand against the window. But there was a strange sound, too. Something that was not sand tapping on the panes, nor yet the shrill keening of the savage wind that moaned against the building. A faint whining that bore a pattern of melody, the sobbing of music—music that sneaked in and out of the wind blasts until one wondered if it was really there or was just imagination.

Monk sat stiffly, poised, cigarette drooping, ears straining.

It came again, the cry of strings, the breath of lilting cadence, until it was a thing apart from the wind and the patter of the sand.

A violin! Someone playing a violin inside the museum!

Monk leaped to his feet and suddenly the violin screamed in singing agony.

And even as that melodic scream ran full voiced through the hall outside, a sharp bell of warning clanged inside Monk's brain.

Acting on impulse, his hand shot down and snatched up the Asteroid jewel. Clutching it savagely, he hurled it viciously against the metallic side of the manuscript cabinet.

It flashed for a moment in the light as it exploded into tiny bits of glowing dust. And even as it splashed to shards, it changed—or tried to change. For just a moment it was not a jewel, but something else, a fairy-

like thing—but a crippled fairy. A fairy with humped back and crooked spine and other curious deformities.

Then there was no twisted fairy, but only jewel dust twinkling on the floor and the sound of running feet far down the corridor.

Monk did not try to give chase to the man outside. Instead, he stood as if frozen, listening to the wind and the sand dance on the window, staring at the sparkle on the floor.

He slowly closed and opened his right hand, trying to remember just how the jewel had left at the instant he had clutched it. Almost as if it might have been alive, were struggling to get out of his clutches, fighting to attain some end, to carry out some destiny.

His eyes still were upon the floor.

"Now," he said aloud, amazement in his words, "I wonder why I did that?"

Standing in front of Spencer Chambers' desk, Harrison Kemp was assailed by doubt, found that in this moment he could not reconcile himself to the belief he had done the right thing. If he were wrong, he had deserted a post he should have kept. Even if he were right, what good could his action do?

"I remember you very well," he heard Chambers say. "You have been out on Pluto. Life research. Some real achievements in that direction."

"We have failed too often," Kemp told him flatly.

Chambers matched his fingers on the desk in front of him. "We all fail too often," Chambers said. "And yet, some day, some one of us will succeed, and then it will be as if all of us succeeded. We can write off the wasted years."

Kemp stood stiff and straight. "Perhaps you wonder why I'm here."

Chambers smiled a little. "Perhaps I do. And yet, why should I. You have been gone from Earth for a long time. Perhaps you wanted to see the planet once again."

"It wasn't that," Kemp told him. "It's something else. I came because I am about to go insane."

Chambers gasped involuntarily.

"Say that again," he whispered. "Say it slowly. Very slowly."

"You heard me," said Kemp. "I came because I'm going to crack. I came here first. Then I'm going out to Sanctuary. But I thought you'd like to know—well, know, that a man can tell it in advance."

"Yes," said Chambers, "I want to know. But even more than that. I want to know how you can tell."

"I couldn't myself," Kemp told him. "It was Findlay who knew."

"Findlay?"

"A man who worked with me on Pluto. And he didn't really know. What I mean is he had no actual evidence. But he had a hunch."

"A hunch?" asked Spencer Chambers. "Just a hunch? That's all?"

"He's had them before," Kemp declared. "And they're usually right. He had one about Johnny Gardner before Johnny cracked up. Told me I should send him back. I didn't. Johnny cracked."

"Only about Johnny Gardner?"

"No, about other things as well. About ways to go about our research, ways that aren't orthodox. But they usually bring results. And about what will happen the next day or the day after that. Just little inconsequential things. Has a feeling, he says—a feeling for the future."

Chambers stirred uneasily. "You've been thinking about this?" he asked. "Trying to puzzle it out. Trying to explain it."

"Perhaps I have," admitted Kemp, "but not in the way you mean. I'm not crazy yet. May not be tomorrow or next week or even next month. But I've watched myself and I'm pretty sure Findlay was right. Small things that point the way. Things most men would just pass by, never give a second thought. Laugh and say they were growing old or getting clumsy."

"Like what?" asked Chambers.

"Like forgetting things. I should know. Elemental facts, even. Having to think before I can tell you what seven times eight equals. Facts that should be second nature. Trying to recall certain laws and fumbling around with them. Having to concentrate too hard upon laboratory technique. Getting it all eventually, even quickly, but with a split-second lag."

Chambers nodded. "I see what you mean. Maybe the psychologists could help—"

"It wouldn't work," declared Kemp. "The lag isn't so great but a man could cover up. And if he knew someone was watching he would cover up. That would be instinctive. When it becomes noticeable to someone other than yourself it's gone too far. It's the brain running down, tiring out, beginning to get fuzzy. The first danger signals."

"That's right," said Chambers. "There is

another answer, too. The psychologists, themselves, would go insane."

He lifted his head, appeared to stare at Kemp.

"Why don't you sit down?" he asked.

"Thank you," said Kemp. He sank into a chair. On the desk the spidery little statue moved with a scuttling shamble and Kemp jumped in momentary fright.

Chambers laughed quietly. "That's only Hannibal."

Kemp stared at Hannibal and Hannibal stared back, reached out a tentative claw.

"He likes you," said Chambers in surprise. "You should consider that a compliment, Kemp. Usually he simply ignores people."

Kemp stared stonily at Hannibal, fascinated by him. "How do you know he likes me?"

"I have ways of knowing," Chambers said.

Kemp extended a cautious finger, and for a moment Hannibal's claw closed about it tightly, but gently. Then the grotesque little being drew away, squatted down, became a statue once again.

"What is he?" Kemp asked.

Chambers shook his head. "No one knows. No one can even guess. A strange form of life. You are interested in life, aren't you, Kemp?"

"Naturally," said Kemp. "I've lived with it for years, wondering what it is, trying to find out."

Chambers reached out and picked up Hannibal, put him on his shoulder. Then he lifted a sheaf of papers from his desk, shuffled through them, picked out half a dozen sheets.

"I have something here that should interest you," he said. "You've heard of Dr. Monk."

Kemp nodded. "The man who found the Rosetta scroll of Mars."

"Ever meet him?"

Kemp shook his head.

"Interesting chap," said Chambers. "Buried neck-deep in his beloved Martian manuscripts. Practically slaving in anticipation, but getting just a bit afraid."

He rustled the sheets. "I heard from him last week. Tells me he has found evidence that life, a rather queer form of life, once existed on the fifth planet before it disrupted to form the Asteroids. The Martians wrote that this life was able to encyst itself, live over long periods in suspended animation.

Not the mechanically induced suspended animation the human race has tried from time to time, but a natural encysted, a variation of protective coloration."

"Interesting," said Kemp, "but a bit out of my line. It suggests many possibilities. Shows the almost endless flexibility of life as such."

Chambers nodded. "I thought maybe you would have that reaction. It was mine, too, but I'm not an expert on that sort of thing. Monk hints that life form still may exist. Hints at other things, too. He seemed to be upset when he wrote the letter. Almost as if he were on the verge of a discovery he himself couldn't quite believe. A little frightened at it, even. Not wanting to say too much, you see, until he was absolutely sure."

"Why should something like that upset him?" demanded Kemp. "It's information out of the past. Surely something he finds in those old scrolls can't reach out—"

Chambers lifted his hand. "You haven't heard it all. The Martians were afraid of that life on the fifth planet, Kemp. Deathly afraid of it! So afraid of it they blew up the planet, blasted it, destroyed it, thinking that in doing so they would wipe out the life it bore."

Chambers' face did not change. He did not stir.

"Monk believes they failed," he said.

The room swam in almost frightened silence. Hannibal stirred uneasily on his perch on Chambers' shoulder.

"Can you imagine"—Chambers' voice was almost a whisper. "Can you imagine a fear so great that a race would blow up, destroy another planet to rid themselves of it?"

Kemp shook his head. "It seems rather hard, and yet, given a fear great enough—"

He stopped and shot a sudden look at Chambers. "Why have you bothered to tell me this?" he asked.

"Why, don't you see?" said Chambers smoothly. "Here might be a new kind of life—a different kind of life, developed millions of years ago under another environment. It might have followed a divergent quirk of development, just some tiny, subtle difference that would provide a key."

"I see what you're driving at," said Kemp. "But not me. Findlay is your man. I haven't got the time. I'm living on borrowed sanity. And, to start with, you haven't even got that life. You hardly would know what to look for. An encysted form

of life. That could be anything. Send a million men out into the Asteroids to hunt for it and it might take a thousand years.

"The idea is sound, of course. We've followed it in other instances, without success. The moon men of Jupiter were no help. Neither were the Venusians. The Martians, of course, were out of the picture to start with. We don't even know what they were like. Not even a skeleton of them has been found. Maybe the race they were afraid of got them after all—did away with them completely."

Chambers smiled bleakly. "I should have known it was no use."

"I'm sorry," said Kemp. "I have to go to Sanctuary. I've seen some others when it happened to them. Johnny Gardner and Smith and Lempke. It's not going to happen to me that way if I can help it."

Chambers matched his fingers carefully. "You've been in the service a long time, Kemp."

"Ten years," said Kemp.

"During those ten years you have worked with scarcely a thought of yourself," said Chambers quietly. "There is no need to be modest. I know your record. You have held a certain ideal. An ideal for a better Solar System, a better human life. You would have given your right arm to have done something that would actually have contributed to the betterment of mankind. Like finding out what life is, for example. You came here now because you thought what you had to tell might help."

Kemp sat without speaking.

"Isn't that it?" insisted Chambers.

"Perhaps it is," admitted Kemp. "I've never thought of it in just those words. To me it was a job."

"Would you do another job?" asked Chambers. "Another job for mankind? Without knowing why you did it? Without asking any questions?"

Kemp leaped to his feet. "I've told you I was going to Sanctuary," he shouted. "I have done what I can, all I can. You can't ask me to wait around for—"

"You will go to Sanctuary," said Chambers sharply.

"But this job—"

"When you go to Sanctuary I want you to take Hannibal along."

Kemp gasped. "Hannibal?"

"Exactly," said Chambers. "Without asking me why."

Kemp opened his mouth to speak, closed it.

"Now?" he finally asked.

"Now," said Chambers. He rose, lifted Hannibal from his shoulder, placed him on Kemp's shoulder. Kemp felt the sharp claws digging through his clothing, into his flesh, felt one tiny arm pawing at his neck, seeking a hold.

Chambers patted Hannibal on the head. Tears welled out of his sightless eyes behind the large dark glasses.

Sanctuary was a place of beauty, a beauty that gripped one by the throat and held him, as if against a wall.

Once, a few years ago, Kemp realized, it had been a barren hunk of rock, five miles across at most, tumbling through space on an eccentric orbit. No air, no water—nothing but stark stone that glinted dully when the feeble rays of the distant sun chanced to fall across its surface.

But now it was a garden with lacy waterfalls and singing streams arched by feathery trees in whose branches flitted warbling birds. Cleverly concealed lighting held the black of space at bay and invested the tiny planetoid with a perpetual just-before-dusk, a soft and radiant light that dimmed to purple shadows where the path of flagging ran up the jagged hill crowned by a classic building of shining white plastic.

A garden built by blasting disintegrators that shaped the face of the rock to an architect's blueprint, that gouged deep wells for the gravity apparatus, that chewed the residue of its labor into the basis for the soil in which the trees and other vegetation grew. A garden made livable by machines that manufactured air and water, that screened out the lashing radiations that move through naked space—and yet no less beautiful because it was man and machine-made.

Kemp hesitated beside a deep, still pool just below a stretch of white sprayed, singing water crossed by a rustic bridge and drank in the scene that ran up the crags before him. A scene that whispered with a silence made up of little sounds. And as he stood there a deep peace fell upon him, a peace he could almost feel, feel it seeping into his brain, wrapping his body—almost as if it were something he could reach and grasp.

It was almost as if he had always lived there, as if he knew and loved this place from long association. The many black years on Pluto were dimmed into a distant memory and it seemed as if a weight had

fallen from his shoulders, from the shoulders of his soul.

A bird twittered sleepily and the water spashed on stones. A tiny breeze brought the swishing of the waterfall that feathered down the cliff and a breath of fragrance from some blooming thing. Far off a bell chimed softly, like a liquid note running on the scented air.

Something scurried in the bushes and scuttled up the path and, looking down, Kemp saw Hannibal and at the sight of the grinning face of the little creature his thoughts were jerked back into pattern again.

"Thank goodness you decided to show up," said Kemp. "Where you been? What's the idea of hiding out on me?"

Hannibal grimaced at him.

Well, thought Kemp, that was something less to worry about now. Hannibal was in Sanctuary and technically that carried out the request Chambers had made of him. He remembered the minute of wild panic when, landing at Sanctuary spaceport, he had been unable to find the creature. Search of the tiny one-man ship in which he had come to Sanctuary failed to locate the missing Hannibal, and Kemp had finally given up, convinced that somehow during the past few hours, Chambers' pet had escaped into space, although that had seemed impossible.

"So you hid out somewhere," Kemp said. "Scared they'd find you, maybe, and refuse to let you in. You needn't have worried, though, for they didn't pay any attention to me or to the ship. Just gave me a parking ticket and pointed out the path."

He stooped and reached for Hannibal, but the creature backed away into the bushes.

"What's the matter with you?" snapped Kemp. "You were chummy enough until just—"

His voice fell off, bewildered. He was talking to nothing. Hannibal was gone.

For a moment Kemp stood on the path, then turned slowly and started up the hill. And as he followed the winding trail that skirted the crags, he felt the peace of the place take hold of him again and it was as if he walked an old remembered way, as if he begrudged every footstep for the beauty that he left behind, but moved on to a newer beauty just ahead.

He met the old man halfway up the hill and stood aside because there was not room

for both to keep the path. For some reason the man's brown robe reaching to his ankles and his bare feet padding in the little patches of dust that lay among the stones, even his flowing white beard did not seem strange, but something that fitted in the picture.

"Peace be on you," the old man said, and then stood before him quietly, looking at him out of calm blue eyes.

"I welcome you to Sanctuary," the old man said. "I have something for you."

He thrust his hand into a pocket of his robe and brought out a gleaming stone, held it toward Kemp.

Kemp stared at it.

"For you, my friend," the old man insisted.

Kemp stammered. "But it's . . . it's an Asteroid jewel."

"It is more than that, Harrison Kemp," declared the oldster. "It is much more than that."

"But even—"

The other spoke smoothly, unhurriedly. "You still react as you did on Earth—out in the old worlds, but here you are in a new world. Here values are different, standards of life are not the same. We do not hate, for one thing. Nor do we question kindness, rather we expect it—and give it. We are not suspicious of motives."

"But this is a sanitarium," Kemp blurted out. "I came here to be treated. Treated for insanity."

A smile flicked at the old man's lips. "You are wondering where you'll find the office and make arrangements for treatment."

"Exactly," said Kemp.

"The treatment," declared the oldster, "already has started. Somewhere along this path you found peace—a greater, deeper peace than you've ever known before. Don't tell yourself it's wrong for you to feel it. Accept it and hold it close. The insanity of your worlds is a product of your lives, your way of life. We offer you a new way of life. That is our treatment."

Hesitantly, Kemp reached out and took the jewel. "And this is a part of that new way of life?"

The old man nodded. "Another part is a little chapel you will find along the way. Stop there for a moment. Step inside and look at the painting you will find there."

"Just look at a painting?"

"That's right. Just look at it."

"And it will help me?"

"It may."

The old man stepped down the path. "Peace go with you," he said and paced slowly down the hill.

Kemp stared at the jewel in his palm, saw the slow wash of color stir within its heart.

"Stage setting," he told himself, although he didn't say it quite aloud.

A pastoral scene of enchanting beauty, a man who wore a brown robe and a long white beard, the classic white lines of the building on the plateau, the chapel with a painting. Of course a man would find peace here. How could a man help but find peace here? It was designed and built for the purpose—this scene. Just as an architect would design and an engineer would build a spaceship. Only a spaceship was meant to travel across the void, and this place, this garden, was meant to bring peace to troubled men, men with souls so troubled that they were insane.

Kemp stared at a flowering crab-apple tree that clung to the rocks above him, and even as he watched a slight breeze shook the tree and a shower of petals cascaded down toward him. Dimly, Kemp wondered if that tree kept on blooming over and over again. Perhaps it did. Perhaps it never bore an apple, perhaps it just kept on flowering. For its function here in Sanctuary was to flower, not to fruit. Blossoms had more psychological value as a stage setting than apples—therefore, perhaps, the tree kept on blossoming and blossoming.

Peace, of course. But how could they make it stick? How could the men who ran Sanctuary make peace stay with a man? Did the painting or the Asteroid jewel have something to do with it? And could peace alone provide the answer to the twisted brains that came here?

Doubt jabbed at him with tiny spears, doubt and skepticism—the old skepticism he had brought with him from the dusty old worlds, the frigid old worlds, the bitter old worlds that lay outside the pale of Sanctuary.

And yet doubt, even skepticism, quailed before the beauty of the place, faltered when he remembered the convincing sincerity of the old man in the brown robe, when he remembered those calm blue eyes and the majesty of the long white beard. It was hard to think, Kemp told himself, that all of this could be no more than mere psychological trappings.

He shook his head, bewildered, brushing

clinging apple blossoms from his shoulder and resumed his climb, Asteroid jewel still clutched tightly in his hand. The path narrowed until it was scarcely wide enough to walk upon, with the sheer wall on his right knifing up toward the plateau, the precipice to his left dropping abruptly into a little valley where the brook gurgled and laughed beneath the waterfall that loomed just ahead.

At the second turn he came upon the chapel. A little place, it stood close to the path, recessed a little into the wall of rock. The door stood ajar, as if inviting him.

Hesitating for a moment, Kemp stepped into the recess, pushed gently on the door and stepped inside. Stepped inside and halted, frozen by the painting that confronted him. Set in a rocky alcove in the wall, it was lighted by a beam that speared down from the ceiling just above the door.

As if it were a scene one came upon through an open window rather than one caught upon a canvas, the city stood framed within the flare of light—a weird, fantastic city sprawled on some outer world. Bizarre architecture rearing against an outlandish background; towers leaping upward and fading into nothing, showing no clear-cut line where they left off; spidery sky bridges coiling and looping among the spires and domes that somehow were not the way spires and domes should be—the city looked like the impassioned chiselings of some mad sculptor.

And as Kemp stood transfixed before the city in the wall, a bell chinged far above him, one sharp clear note that lanced into his brain and shook him like an angry fist.

Something stirred within his hand, something that came to life and grew and wanted to be free. With a wild exclamation, Kemp jerked his hand in front of him, shaking it to free it of the thing that moved within it—repugnance choking him, an instinctive gesture born in the human race by spiders in dark caves, by crawling things that dropped off jungle leaves and bit.

But it was no spider, no crawling thing. Instead it was a light, a little point of light that slipped from between his fingers and rose and swiftly faded into nothing. And even as it faded, Kemp felt cool fingers on his jumping nerves, fingers that soothed them and quieted them until he felt peace flow toward him once again, but this time a deeper, calmer, vaster peace that took in all the universe, that left him breathless with the very thought of it.

Claws rustled on the floor behind him and a dark form sailed through the air to land upon his shoulder.

"Hannibal!" yelled the startled Kemp.

But, even as he yelled, Hannibal launched himself into the air again, straight from Kemp's shoulder into empty air, striking viciously at something that was there, something that fought back, but something Kemp could not see at all.

"Hannibal!" Kemp shrieked again, and the shriek was raw and vicious as he realized that his new-found peace had been stripped from him as one might strip a cloak, leaving him naked in the chill of sudden fear.

Hannibal was fighting something, of that there was no doubt. An invisible something that struggled to get free. But Hannibal had a death grip. His savage jaws were closed upon something that had substance, his terrible claws raked at it, tore at it.

Kemp backed away until he felt the stone wall at his back, then stood and stared with unbelieving eyes.

Hannibal was winning out, was dragging the thing in the air down to the ground. As if he were performing slow-motion acrobatics, he twisted and turned in the air, was slowly sinking toward the floor. And never for a moment were those scythelike claws idle. They raked and slashed and tore and the thing that fought them was weakening, dropped faster and faster.

Just before they reached the floor, Hannibal relaxed his grip for a moment, twisted in midair like a cat and pounced again. For a fleeting second Kemp saw the shape of the thing Hannibal held between his jaws, the thing he shook and shook, then cast contemptuously aside—a shimmering, fairy-like thing with dragging wings and a mothlike body. Just a glimpse, that was all. "Hannibal!" gasped Kemp. "Hannibal, what have you done?"

Hannibal stood on bowed legs and stared back at him with eyes in which Kemp saw the smoky shine of triumph. Like a cat might look when it has caught a bird, like a man might look when he kills a mortal enemy.

"It gave me peace," said Kemp. "Whatever it was, it gave me peace. And now—"

He took a slow step forward and Hannibal backed away.

But Kemp stopped as a swift thought struck him.

The Asteroid jewel!

Slowly he lifted his two hands and looked at them and found them empty. The

jewel, he remembered, had been clutched in his right hand and it had been from that hand that the shining thing arose.

He caught his breath, still staring at his hands.

An Asteroid jewel one moment, and the next, when the bell chimed, a spot of glowing light—then nothing. And yet something, for Hannibal had killed something, a thing that had a mothlike body and still could not have been a moth, for a man can see a moth.

Kemp's anger at Hannibal faded and in its place came a subtle fear, a fear that swept his brain and left it chisel-sharp and cold with the almost certain knowledge that here he faced an alien threat, a siren threat, a threat that was a lure.

Chambers had told him about a life that could encyst itself, could live in suspended animation; had voiced a fear that the old Martians, who had tried to sweep that life away, had failed.

Could it be that the Asteroid jewels were the encysted life?

Kemp remembered things about the jewels. They never had been analyzed. They were found nowhere else except upon the Asteroids.

The bell might have been the signal for them to awake, a musical note that broke up the encystation, that returned the sleeping entity to its original form.

Entities that were able to give peace. Entities that could cure the twisted brains of men, probably by some subtle change of outlook, by the introduction of some mental factor that man had never known before.

Kemp remembered, with a sudden surge of longing, a stinging sense of loss, the mental peace that had reached out to him—for a fleeting moment felt a deep and sharp regret that it had been taken from him.

But despite that ability to give peace, the Martians had feared them, feared them with a deep and devastating fear—a fear so great they had destroyed a planet to rid the System of them. And the Martians were an old race and a wise race.

If the Martians had feared them there was at least good grounds to suspect Earthmen should fear them, too.

And as he stood there, the horror of the situation seeped into Kemp's brain. A sanitarium that cured mental cases by the simple process of turning those mental

cases over to an alien life which had the power to impose upon the mind its own philosophy, to shape the human mind as it should be shaped. A philosophy that started out with the concept of mental peace and ended—where?

But that was something one couldn't figure out, Kemp knew—something there was no way to figure out. It could lead anywhere. Especially since one had no way of knowing what sort of mental concepts the aliens of the fifth planet might hold. Concepts that might be good or ill for the human race, but concepts that certainly would not be entirely human.

Clever! So clever that Kemp wondered now why he had not suspected sooner, why he had not smelled a certain rottenness. First the garden to lull one into deceptiveness—that odd feeling one had always known this place, making him feel that he was at home so he would put his guard down. Then the painting—meant, undoubtedly to establish an almost hypnotic state, designed to hold a man transfixed in rapt attention until it was too late to escape the attention of the reawakened life. If, in fact, anyone would have wanted to escape.

That was the insidious part of it—they gave a man what he wanted, what he longed for, something he missed out in the older worlds of struggle and progress. Like a drug—

Claws rattled on the floor.

"Hannibal!" yelled Kemp. But Hannibal didn't stop.

Kemp plunged toward the door, still calling. "Hannibal! Hannibal, come back here!"

Far up the slope there was a rustle in the bushes. A tiny pebble came tapping down the hill.

"Peace be on you," said a familiar voice, and Kemp spun around. The old man with the brown robe and the long white whiskers stood in the narrow path.

"Is there anything wrong?" asked the oldster.

"No," said Kemp. "Not yet. But there's going to be!"

"I do not—"

"Get out of my way," snapped Kemp. "I'm going back!"

The blue eyes were as calm as ever, the words as unhurried. "No one ever goes back, son."

"Gramp," warned Kemp grimly, "if you don't step in here so I can go down the path—"

The old man's hands moved quickly, plunging into the pockets of his robe. Even as Kemp started forward they came out again, tossed something upward and for one breathless instant Kemp saw a dozen or more gleaming Asteroid jewels shimmering in the air, a shower of flashing brilliance.

Bells were clamoring, bells all over the Asteroid, chiming out endlessly that one clear note, time after time, stabbing at Kemp's brain with the clarity of their tones—turning those sparkling jewels into things that would grasp his mind and give him peace and make him something that wasn't quite human.

With a bellow of baffled rage, Kemp charged. He saw the old man's face in front of him, mouth open, those calm eyes now deep pools of hatred, tinged with a touch of fear. Kemp's fist smacked out, straight into the face, white whiskers and all. The face disappeared and a scream rang out as the oldster toppled off the ledge and plunged toward the rocks below.

Cool fingers touched Kemp's brain, but he plunged on, almost blindly, down the path. The fingers slipped away and others came and for a moment the peace rolled over him once again. With the last dregs of will power he fought it off, screaming like a tortured man, keeping his legs working like pistons. The wind brought the scent of apple blossoms to him and he wanted to stop beside the brook and take off his shoes and know the feel of soft green grass beneath his feet.

But that, one cold corner of his brain told him, was the way they wanted him to feel, the very thing Sanctuary wanted him do. Staggering, he ran, reeling drunkenly.

He staggered, and as he fell his hand struck something hard and he picked it up. It was a branch, a dead branch fallen from some tree. Grimly, he tested it and found it hard and strong, gripped it in one hand and stumbled down the path.

The club gave him something—some strange psychological advantage—a weapon that he whirled around his head when he screamed at the things that would have seized his mind.

Then there was hard ground beneath his feet—the spaceport. Men ran toward him, yelling at him, and he sprinted forward to meet them, a man that might have been jerked from the caves of Europe half a million years before—a maddened, frothing man with a club in hand, with a savage gleam in his eyes, hair tousled, shirt ripped off.

The club swished and a man slumped to the ground. Another man charged in and the club swished and Harrison Kemp screamed in killing triumph.

The men broke and ran, and Kemp, roaring, chased them down the field.

Somehow he found his ship and spun the lock.

Inside, he shoved the throttle up the rack, forgetting, about the niceties of take-off whipping out into the maw of space with a jerk that almost broke his neck, that gouged deep furrows in the port and crumpled one end of the hangar.

Kemp glanced back just once at the glowing spot that was Sanctuary. After that he kept his face straight ahead. The knotted club still lay beside his chair.

Dr. Daniel Monk ran his finger around the inside of his collar, seemed about to choke.

"But you told me," he stammered. "You sent for me—"

"Yes," agreed Spencer Chambers, "I did tell you I had a Martian. But I haven't got him now. I sent him away."

Monk stared blankly.

"I had need of him elsewhere," Chambers explained.

"I don't understand," Monk declared weakly. "Perhaps he will be coming back."

Chambers shook his head. "I had hoped so, but now I am afraid . . . afraid—"

"But you don't realize what a Martian would mean to us!" Monk blurted.

"Yes I do," declared Chambers. "He could read the manuscripts. Much more easily, much more accurately than they can be translated. That was why I sent for you. That, in fact, was how I knew he was a Martian in the first place. He read some of the photostatic copies of the manuscripts you sent me."

Monk straightened in his chair. "He read them! You mean you could talk with him!"

Chambers grinned. "Not exactly talk with him, Monk. That is he didn't make sounds like you and I do."

The chairman of the Solar-Control Board leaned across the desk.

"Look at me," he commanded. "Look closely. Can you see anything wrong?"

Monk stammered. "Why, no, Nothing wrong. Those glasses, but a lot of people wear them."

"I know," said Chambers. "A lot of people wear them for effect. Because they think it's smart. But I don't. I wear mine to hide my eyes."

"Your eyes!" whispered Monk. "You mean there's something—"

"I'm blind," said Chambers. "Very few people know it. I've kept it a careful secret. I haven't wanted the world's pity. I don't want the knowledge I can't see hampering my work. People wouldn't trust me."

Monk started to speak, but his words dribbled into silence.

"Don't feel sorry for me," snapped Chambers. "That's the very thing I've been afraid of. That's why no one knows. I wouldn't have told you except I had to tell to explain about Hannibal."

"Hannibal?"

"Hannibal," said Chambers, "is the Martian. People thought he was my pet. Something I carried around with me because of vanity. Because I wanted something different. Something to catch the headlines. But he was more than a pet. He was a Seeing-eye dog. He was my eyes. With Hannibal around I could see. Better than I could see with my own eyes. Much better."

Monk started forward, then settled back. "You mean Hannibal was telepathic?"

Chambers nodded. "Naturally telepathic. Perhaps it was the way the Martians talked. The only way they could talk. He telepathed perfect visual images of everything he saw and in my mind I could see as clearly, as perfectly as if I had seen with my own eyes. Better even, for Hannibal had powers of sight a human does not have."

Monk tapped his fingers on the chair arm, staring out the window at the pines that marched along the hill.

"Hannibal was found out in the Asteroids, wasn't he?" Monk asked suddenly.

"He was," said Chambers. "Until a few days ago I didn't know what he was. No one knew what he was. He was just a thing that saw for me. I tried to talk with him and couldn't. There seemed no way in which to establish a communication of ideas. Almost as if he didn't know there was such things as ideas. He read the newspapers for me. That is, he looked at the page, and in my mind I saw the page and read it. But I was the one that had to do the reading. All Hannibal did was telepath the picture of the paper to me and my mind would do the work. But when I picked up the manuscript photostats it was Hannibal who read. To me they meant nothing—just funny marks. But Hannibal knew. He read them to me. He made me see the things they said. I knew then he was a Martian. No one else

but a Martian, or Dr. Monk, could read that stuff."

He matched his fingers carefully. "I've wondered how, since he was a Martian, he got into the Belt. How he could have managed to survive. When we first found him there was no reason to suspect he was a Martian. After all, we didn't know what a Martian was. They left no description of themselves. No paintings, no sculptures."

"The Martians," said Monk, "didn't run to art. They were practical, deadly serious, a race without emotion."

He drummed his fingers along the chair arm again. "There's just one thing. Hannibal was your eyes. You needed him. In such a case I can't imagine why you would have parted with him."

"I needed to see," said Chambers, "in a place I couldn't go."

"You . . . you. What was that?"

"Exactly what I said. There was a place I had to see. A place I had to know about. For various reasons it was closed to me. I could not, dare not, go there. So I sent Hannibal. I sent my eyes there for me."

"And you saw?"

"I did."

"You mean you could send him far away—"

"I sent him to the Asteroids," said Chambers. "To be precise, to Sanctuary. Millions of miles. And I saw what he saw. Still see what he sees, in fact. I can't see you because I'm blind. But I see what's happening on Sanctuary this very moment. Distance has no relation to telepathy. Even the first human experiments in it demonstrated that."

The phone on Chambers' desk buzzed softly. He groped for the receiver, finally found it, lifted it. "Hello," he said.

"This is Moses Allen," said the voice on the other end. "Reports are just starting to come in. My men are rounding up the Asteroid jewels. Got bushels of them so far. Putting them under locks you'd have to use atomics to get open."

Worry edged Chambers' voice. "You made sure there was no slip. No way anyone could get wind of what we're doing and hide out some of them."

Allen chuckled. "I got thousands of men on the job. All of them hit at the same minute. First we checked records of all sales. To be sure we knew just who had them and how many. We haven't got a few of them yet, but we know who's got them. Some of

the owners are a little stubborn, but we'll sweat it out of them. We know they've got them cached away somewhere."

He laughed. "One funny thing, chief. Old Lady Templefinger—the society dame, you know—had a rope of them, some of the finest in the world. We can't find them. She claims they disappeared. Into thin air, just like that. One night at a concert. But we—"

"Wait a second," snapped Chambers. "A concert, you said?"

"Sure, a concert. Recital, I guess, is a better name for it. Some long-haired violinist."

"Allen," rapped Chambers, "check up on that recital. Find out who was there. Drag them in. Hold them on some technical charge. Anything at all, just so you hold them. Treat them just as if they were people who had been cured by Sanctuary. Grab on to them and don't let them go."

"Cripes, chief," protested the Secret Service man, "we might run into a barrel of trouble. The old lady would've had some big shots—"

"Don't argue," shouted Chambers. "Get going. Pick them up. And anyone else who was round when any other jewels evaporated. Check up on all strange jewel disappearances. No matter how far back. Don't quit until you're sure in every case. And hang onto everybody. Everyone who's ever had anything to do with Sanctuary."

"O.K.," agreed Allen. "I don't know what you're aiming at, but we'll do—"

"Another thing," said Chambers. "How about the whispering campaign?"

"We've got it started," Allen said. "And it's a lulu, chief. I got busybodies tearing around all over the Solar System. Spreading the word. Nothing definite. Just whispers. Something wrong with Sanctuary. Can't trust them. Can't tell what happens to you when you go there. Why, I heard about a guy just the other day—"

"That's the idea," approved Chambers. "We simply can't tell the real story, but we have to do something to stop people from going there. Frighten them a bit, make them wonder."

"Come morning," said Allen, "and the whole System will be full of stories. Some of them probably even better than those we started with. Sanctuary will starve to death waiting for business after we get through with them."

"That," said Chambers, "is just exactly what we want."

He hung up the phone, fumbling awkwardly, then turned his head toward Monk.

"You heard?" he asked.

"Enough," said Monk. "If it's something I should forget—"

"It's nothing you should forget," Chambers told him. "You're in this with me. Clear up to the hilt."

"I've guessed some of it," said Monk. "A lot of it, in fact. Found some of it from hints in the manuscripts. Some from what I've heard you say. I've been sitting here, trying to straighten it out, trying to make all the factors fall together. The Asteroid jewels, of course, are the encysted life form from the fifth planet and someone on Sanctuary is using them to do to us just what they planned to do to the Martian race—may have done to the Martian race."

"The man out on Sanctuary," said Chambers, "is Jan Nichols, but I doubt if he is using the asterites. More probably they are using him. Some years ago he headed an expedition into the Belt and disappeared. When he came to light again he was the head of Sanctuary. Somehow, while he was out there, he must have come under control of the asterites. Maybe someone played a violin, struck just the right note when he had an Asteroid jewel on his person. Or it might have happened some other way. There's no way of knowing. The worst of it is that now he probably is convinced he is engaged in a great crusade. That's the most dangerous thing about the asterites or the fifth-planet people or whatever you want to call them. Their propaganda is effective because once one is exposed to them he becomes one of them, in philosophy if not in fact and, after all, it's the philosophy, the way of thinking that counts."

Chambers shuddered, as if a cold wind might be sweeping through the room. "It's a beautiful philosophy, Monk. At least, on the surface. God knows what it is underneath. I gained a glimpse of it, several times, through Hannibal. It was that strong, strong enough even to force its way through the veil of hatred that he held for them, powerful enough to reach through the vengeance in his mind. The vengeance that's driving him out there now."

"Vengeance?" asked Monk.

"He's killing them," said Chambers. "As you and I might kill vermin. He's berserk, killing mad. I've tried to call him back. Tried to get him to hide so we can rescue him without the certainty of losing every man we sent out. For some reason, perhaps

because he knows them better, hates them more, Hannibal can stand against them. But a man couldn't, a man wouldn't have a chance. Sanctuary is stirred up like a nest of maddened bees."

Chambers' face sagged. "But I can't call him back. I can't even reach him any more. I still see the things he sees. He still keeps contact with me, probably because he wants me to observe, through his mind, as long as possible. Hoping, perhaps, that the human race will take up where he left off—if he leaves off."

"Hannibal is carrying out his destiny," Monk said gravely. "I can patch it together now. Things I didn't understand before. Things I found in the manuscripts. Hannibal slept through time for this very day."

Chambers snapped his head erect, questioningly.

"That's right," said Monk. "The Martians, in their last days, perfected a fairly safe method of suspended animation. Perhaps they used principles they stole from the fifth planet, perhaps not. It doesn't matter. They placed a number of their people in suspended animation. How many, I don't know. The number's there, but I can't read it. It might be a hundred or a thousand. Anyway, it was a lot of them. And they scattered them all over the Solar System. They took some to the Asteroids, some to Earth, some to the Jovian moons, some even out to Pluto. They left them everywhere. They left them in those different places and then the rest of the race went home to die. I wondered why they did it. The symbol was there to tell me, but I couldn't read the symbol."

Chambers nodded. "You have to fill in too many things, the translation leaves too many blanks."

"I had a hunch," Monk said, "it might have been an attempt to preserve the race. A wild throw, you know. A desperate people will try almost anything. Where there's life, there's hope. Hang on long enough and something's bound to happen."

"But I was wrong. I can see that now. They did it for revenge. It ties in with the other things we know about the Martians. Perhaps the asterites had destroyed them. They had tried to destroy the asterites, were sure that they had failed. So they left behind a mop-up squad. The rest of them died, but the mop-up squad slept on against a distant day, playing the million-to-one chance. In Hannibal's case, the long shot paid off. He's doing some mopping-up out

in Sanctuary now. It's the last brave gesture of a race that's dead these million years."

"But there are others," said Chambers. "There are—"

"Don't get your hopes up," Monk warned. "Remember the odds. Hannibal carried out his destiny. Even that was more than could have been logically expected. The others—"

"I'm not doing any hoping," Chambers declared. "Not on my own account, anyhow. There's a job to do. We have to do it the best we can. We must guard against the human race going down before the philosophy of these other people. We must keep the human race—human."

"The asterites' creed, on the surface is beautiful, admittedly. What it is beneath the surface, of course, we cannot know. But admitting that it is all that it appears and nothing more, it is not a human creed. It's not the old hell-for-leather creed that has taken man up the ladder, that will continue to take him up the ladder if he hangs onto it. It would wipe out all the harsher emotions and we need those harsher emotions to keep climbing. We can't lie in the sun, we can't stand still, we can't, not yet, even take the time to stand off and admire the things that we have done."

"Peace, the deeper concept of peace, is not for the human race, never was meant for the human race. Conflict is our meat. The desire to beat the other fellow to it, the hankering for glorification, the tendency to heave out one's chest and say, 'I'm the guy that done it,' the satisfaction of tackling a hard job and doing it, even looking for a hard job just for the hell of doing it."

A springtime breeze blew softly through the window. A bird sang and a hushed clock ticked.

There were faces in the blackness that loomed before the speeding spaceship. Faces that swirled in the blackness and shouted. All sorts of faces. Old men and babies. Well-dressed man-about-town and tramp in tattered rags. Women, too. Women with flying hair and tear-streaked cheeks. All shouting, hooked hands raised in anger.

Faces that protested. Faces that pleaded. Faces that damned and called down curses.

Harrison Kemp passed a hand slowly across his eyes and when he took it away the faces were gone. Only space leered back at him.

But he couldn't shake from his mind the things those mouths had said, the words the tongues had shaped.

"What have you done? You have taken Sanctuary from us!"

Sanctuary! Something the race had leaned upon, had counted on, the assurance of a cure, a refuge from the mental mania that ranged up and down the worlds.

Something that was almost God. Something that was the people's friend—a steady hand in the darkness. It was something that was there, always would be there, a shining light in a troubled world, a comforter, something that would never change, something one could tie to.

And now?

Kemp shuddered at the thought.

One word and he could bring all that structure tumbling down about their ears. With one blow he could take away their faith and their assurance. With one breath he could blow Sanctuary into a flimsy house of cards.

For him, he knew, Sanctuary was gone forever. Knowing what he knew, he never could go back. But what about those others? What about the ones who still believed? Might it not be better that he left them their belief? Even if it led down a dangerous road. Even if it were a trap.

But was it a trap? That was a thing, of course, that he could not know. Perhaps, rather, it was the way to a better life.

Perhaps he had been wrong. Perhaps he should have stayed and accepted what Sanctuary offered.

If a human being, as a human being, could not carry out his own destiny, if the race were doomed to madness, if evolution had erred in bringing man along the path he followed, what then? If the human way of life were basically at fault, would it not be better to accept a change before it was too late? On what basis, after all, could mankind judge?

In years to come, working through several generations, Sanctuary might mold mankind to its pattern, might change the trend of human thought and action, point out a different road to travel.

And if that were so, who could say that it was wrong?

Bells were ringing. Not the bells he had heard back on Sanctuary, nor yet the bells he remembered of a Sunday morning in his own home town, but bells that came hauntingly from space. Bells that tolled and blotted out his thoughts.

Madness. Madness stalking the worlds. And yet, need there be madness? Findlay wasn't mad—probably never would go mad.

Kemp's brain suddenly buzzed with a crazy-quilt of distorted thought:

Sanctuary . . . Pluto . . . Johnny Gardner . . . what is life . . . we'll try again—

Unsteadily he reached out for the instrument board, but his fingers were all thumbs. His mind blurred and for one wild moment of panic he could not recognize the panel before him—for one long instant it was merely a curious object with colored lights and many unfamiliar mechanisms.

His brain cleared momentarily and a thought coursed through it—an urgent thought. *Man need not go mad!*

Spencer Chambers! Spencer Chambers had to know!

He reached for the radio and his fingers wouldn't work. They wouldn't go where he wanted them to go.

Kemp set his teeth and fought his hand, fought it out to the radio-control knobs, made his fingers do the job his brain wanted them to do, made them work the dials, forced his mouth to say the things that must be said.

"Kemp calling Earth. Kemp calling Earth. Kemp calling—"

A voice said, "Earth. Go ahead, Kemp."

His tongue refused to move. His hand fell from the set, swayed limply at his side. "Go ahead, Kemp," the voice urged. "Go ahead, Kemp. Go ahead, Kemp."

Kemp grappled with the grayness that was dropping over him, fought it back by concentrating on the simple mechanics of making his lips and tongue move as they had to move.

"Spencer Chambers," he croaked.

"You should have stayed in Sanctuary," blared a voice in his head. "You should have stayed. You should have—"

"Spencer Chambers speaking," said a voice out of the radio. "What is it, Kemp?"

Kemp tried to answer, couldn't.

"Kemp!" yelled Chambers. "Kemp, where are you? What's the matter? Kemp—"

Words came from Kemp's mouth, distorted words, taking a long time to say, jerky—

"No time . . . one thing. Hunch. That's it, Chambers . . . hunch—"

"What do you mean, lad?" yelled Chambers.

"Hunches. Have to play . . . hunches. Everyone hasn't . . . got . . . them. Find . . . those . . . who . . . have—"

There was silence. Chambers was waiting. A wave of grayness blotted out the ship, blotted out space—then light came again.

Kemp gripped the side of his chair with one hand while the other swayed limply at his side. What had he been saying? Where was he? One word buzzed in his brain. What was that word?

Out of the past came a snatch of memory.

"Findlay," he said.

"Yes, what about Findlay?"

"Hunches like . . . instinct. See . . . into . . . future—"

The radio bleated at him. "Kemp! What's the matter? Go on. Do you mean hunches are a new instinct? Tell me. Kemp!"

Harrison Kemp heard nothing. The grayness had come again, blotting out everything. He sat in his chair and his hands hung dangling. His vacant eyes stared into space.

The ship drove on.

On the floor lay a stick, a club Harrison Kemp had picked up on Sanctuary.

The intercommunications set buzzed. Fumbling, Chambers snapped up the tumbler.

"Mr. Allen is here," said the secretary's voice.

"Send him in," said Chambers.

Allen came in, flung his hat on the floor beside a chair, sat down.

"Boys just reported they found Kemp's ship," he said. "Easy to trace it. Radio was wide open."

"Yes?" asked Chambers.

"Loony," said Allen.

Chambers' thin lips pressed together. "I was afraid so. He sounded like it. Like he was fighting it off. And he did fight it off. Long enough, at least, to tell us what he wanted us to know."

"It's queer," Monk said, "that we never thought of it. That someone didn't think of it. It had to wait until a man on the verge of insanity could think of it."

"It may not work," said Chambers, "but it's worth a try. Hunches, he said, are instinct—a new instinct, the kind we need in

the sort of world we live in. Once, long ago, we had instinct the same as animals, but we got rid of it, we got civilized and lost it. We didn't need it any longer. We substituted things for it. Like law and order, houses and other safeguards against weather and hunger and fear.

"Now we face new dangers. Dangers that accompany the kind of civilization we have wrought. We need new instinct to protect us against those dangers. Maybe we have it in hunches or premonition or intuition or whatever name you want to hang on it. Something we've been developing for a long time, for the last ten thousand years, perhaps, never realizing that we had it."

"All of us probably haven't got it," Monk reminded him. "It would be more pronounced in some of us than others."

"We'll find the ones who have it," declared Chambers. "We'll place them in key positions. The psychologists will develop tests for it. We'll see if we can't improve it, develop it. Help it along.

"You have it, Monk. It saved you when the asterites tried to get you that night in Sandebar. Something told you to heave that jewel against the manuscript case. You did it, instinctively, wondering why. You said that afterward you even speculated on why you did it, couldn't find an answer. And yet it was the proper thing to do.

"Findlay out on Pluto has it. Calls it a feeling for the future, the ability to look just a little ways ahead. That looking just a ways ahead will help us keep one jump beyond our problems.

"Allen has it. He investigated Sanctuary on a hunch, even felt ashamed of himself for doing it, but he went ahead and played his hunch."

"Just a second, chief," Allen interrupted. "Before you go any further there's something to be done. We got to go out and bring in Hannibal. Even if it takes the whole fleet—"

"There's no use," said Chambers.

He rose and faced them.

"Hannibal," he said, "died half an hour ago. They killed him."

Slowly he walked around the desk, felt his way across the room toward the window. Once he stumbled on a rug, once he ran into a chair.

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THE END

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The Great Engine

By A. E. van Vogt

There are times when—even in peacetime—science serves better in silence and by stealth. The man who found the mighty engine, dropped from a spaceship, had a chance to do that.

THE blue-gray engine lay half buried in a green hillside.

It lay there in that summer of 1948, a soulless thing of metal and of forces more potent than life itself. Rain washed its senseless form. A July, then an August sun blazed down upon it. In the night the stars looked down wanly, caring nothing for its destiny.

The ship it drove had been nosing down into Earth's atmosphere when the meteoric plowed through the metal that held it in place. Instantly, in the irresistibility of its terrible strength, the engine tore to shreds what remained of the framework and plunged through the gaping meteorite hole, down, down.

For all the weeks since then it had lain in the hillside seemingly lifeless but, actually, in its great fashion, utterly alive.

There was dirt in its force field, so tightly packed that it would have taken eagle eyes to see how swiftly it was spinning. Not even the boys who sat one day on a flange of the engine noticed the convulsions of the dirt.

If one of them had poked a grimy hand into the inferno of energy that was the force field, muscles, bones, blood would have spurted like gas exploding.

But the boys went away; and the engine lay there until the day the searchers passed along the bottom of the hill. Discovery was as close as that. There were two of them, two alert, trained observers who anxiously scanned the hillside. But a cloud was veiling the brightness of the sun, and they passed on unseeing.

It was more than a week later, late in the afternoon, when a horse climbing the hill straddled the protruding bulge of the engine. The horse's rider proceeded to dismount in an astounding fashion.

With his one hand he grasped the saddle-horn and lifted himself clear of the saddle.

Casually, easily, he brought his left leg over, held himself poised in midair, and then dropped to the ground.

The display of strength seemed all the more effortless because the action was entirely automatic; his attention was concentrated the whole while on the thing in the ground.

His lean face twisted as he examined the machine. He glanced around, eyes suddenly narrowed; then he smiled sardonically as he realized the thought in his mind.

Finally, he shrugged. Fat chance of anybody seeing him out here. The town of Crescentville was more than a mile away; and there was no sign of life around the big white house which stood among trees a third of a mile to the northwest.

He was alone with his horse and the machine; and, after a moment, his voice echoed with cool irony on the twilight air:—

"Well, Dandy, here's a job for us. This scrap should buy you quite a bit of feed. We'll haul it to the junk dealer after dark. That way she won't find out and we'll save some remnant of our pride. She—"

He stopped. Involuntarily, he turned to stare at the gardenlike estate whose width stretched for nearly a mile between himself and the town. A white fence, misty and halo-ish in the twilight, made a vast circuit around a green, verdant land of trees and pasture. The fence kept disappearing down gullies and into brush. It vanished finally in the north beyond the stately white house.

The man shook himself impatiently. "What a fool I've been, hanging around Crescentville waiting for her to—" He cut the words with a mental effort and turned to stare down at the engine. "Have to get some idea of its weight—wonder what it is."

He climbed to the top of the hill and came down again carrying a piece of dead-

wood about four feet long and three inches in diameter. He began to pry the engine loose from the ground.

It was awkward work with only a left arm; and so, when he noticed the dirt-plugged hole in the center, he jabbed the wood into it to get better leverage.

His shout of surprise and pain echoed hoarsely on the evening air.

For the wood jerked. Like a shot twisted by the rifled barrel of a gun, like a churning knife, it wrenched in his hand, tearing like a shredder, burning like fire.

He was lifted up, up—and flung twenty feet down the hill. Groaning, clutching his tattered hand to his body, he stumbled to his feet.

The sound died on his lips, then, as his gaze fastened on the throbbing, whirling thing that had been a dead branch of tree.

He stared. Then he climbed, trembling, onto the black horse. Nursing his bloodied hand, blinking from sheer agony, he raced the animal down the hill and toward the highway that led to the town.

A stone boat and harness for Dandy rented from a farmer—rope and tackle—a hand stiff with bandages, still numb with pain—a trek through darkness with a thrumming thing on the stone boat—for three hours Pendrake felt himself a creature in a nightmare, running madly in all directions.

But here was the engine now, on the floor of his stable, safe from discovery except for the sound that was pouring forth from the wood in its force field.

It was funny how his mind had worked. The determination to transport the engine secretly to his own cottage had been like choosing life instead of death, like swiftly picking up a hundred-dollar bill lying on a deserted street: so automatic as to be beyond the need of logic.

It still seemed as natural as living.

The yellow glow from the lantern filled the interior of what had once been a large private garage and workshop. In one corner Dandy stood, black hide aglint, eyes glistening, as he turned his head to stare at the thing that shared his quarters.

The not unpleasant smell of horse was thick now that the door was closed.

The engine lay on its side near the door; and the main trouble was that the wood in it wasn't straight. It slogged away against the air like some caricature of a propeller, beating a sound out of the atmosphere by

the sheer violence and velocity of its rotation.

About eight thousand revolutions a minute, Pendrake estimated and stood stuñned, striving to grasp the kind of machine that could snatch a piece of wood, and—

His mind sagged before the mystery; and he gave it up. But a black frown creased his face as he stared down at the speed-blurred wood.

He couldn't just grab it. And, while undoubtedly there were a number of tools in the world that could grip a whirling bar and pull on it, they were not available here in this lantern-lighted stable.

He thought: "There must be a control, something to switch off the power."

But the bluish-gray, doughnut-shaped outer shell was glass smooth. Even the flanges that projected from four ends and in which were the holes for bed bolts, seemed to grow out of the shell, as if they had been molded from the same block of metal, as if there had been a flowing, original design that spurned anything less than oneness.

Baffled, Pendrake walked around the machine. He had the empty conviction that the problem was beyond the solution of a man who had as his working equipment one badly maimed and bandaged hand.

He noticed something. The machine lay solidly, heavily, on the floor. It neither joggled nor jumped. It made not the slightest effort to begin a sedate, reactionary creep in opposition to the insanely whirling thing that bristled from its middle.

The engine was ignoring the law that action and reaction are equal and opposite.

With abrupt realization of the possibilities, Pendrake bent down and heaved at the engine. Instantly, knives of pain hacked at his hand. Tears shocked into his eyes. But when he finally let go the engine was standing on one of its four sets of flanges; and the crooked wood was spinning, no longer vertically, but roughly horizontal to the floor.

The pulse of agony in Pendrake's hand slowed. He wiped the tears from his eyes and proceeded to the next step in the plan that had occurred to him.

Nails! He drove them into the bed bolt holes, and bent them over the metal. That was just to make sure the narrow-based engine wouldn't topple over in the event that he bumped too hard against the outer shell.

An apple box came next. Laid lengthwise on its side, it reached up to within half an inch of the exact center of the large hole, from the opposite side of which the wood projected. Two books held steady a piece of one-inch piping about a foot long. It was painful holding the small sledge hammer in that lame hand of his, but he struck true.

The piece of piping recoiled from the hammer, banged into the wood where it was held inside the hole of the engine, knocked it out.

There was a crash that shook the garage. After a dazed moment, Pendrake grew aware of a long, splintered slash in the ceiling, through which the four-foot piece of deadwood had bounced after striking the floor.

Slowly, his reverberating mind gravitated into a rhythm with the silence that was settling. Pendrake drew a deep breath. There were still things to discover, a whole, new machine world to explore. But one thing was clear:

He had conquered the engine.

At midnight he was still awake. He kept getting up, dropping the magazine he was reading, and going into the dark kitchen of the cottage to peer out at the darker garage.

But the night was quiet. No marauders disturbed the peace of the town. Occasionally, a car motor sounded far away.

The dozenth time he found himself pressing his face against the cool pane of the kitchen window, Pendrake cursed aloud and went back into the living room muttering invective.

What was he trying to do! He couldn't hope to keep that engine. It must be a new invention, a radical post-war development—lying on that hillside because of an accident that a silly ass who never read papers, or listened to the radio, wouldn't know anything about.

Somewhere in the house, he remembered, was a New York Times he'd bought not so long ago. He found the paper on his magazine rack with all the other old and unread papers and magazines he'd bought from time to time.

The date at the top was June 7, 1947; and this was August 16th. Not too great a difference. It—

But this wasn't 1947. This was 1948!

With a cry Pendrake leaped to his feet, then slowly sank back into his chair. It was an ironic picture that came then, a

kaleidoscope of the existence of a man so untouched by the friction of time that fourteen months had glided by like so many days.

Lazy, miserable hound. Pendrake thought in a blaze of fury, using his lost arm and an unforgiving woman as an excuse for lying down on life. That was over. All of it. He'd start again—

He grew aware of the paper in his hand; and all the irony went out of him as in a gathering excitement he began to glance at the headlines:

PRESIDENT CALLS ON NATION
FOR NEW INDUSTRIAL EFFORT
Two Hundred Billion Dollar National
Income Only Beginning, He says.

GERMANY RECOVERING
SWIFTLY UNDER
UNITED NATIONS PLAN
Shaposhenko Punishment for Leaders
Having Rejuvenating Effect on People,
Occupation Authorities State.

350,000 FAMILY PLANES SOLD
FIRST FIVE MONTHS OF 1947

IS THERE LIFE ON
OTHER PLANETS?
Expect 200 Inch Telescope To Provide
New Evidence—To Be Completed Next
Year.

Pendrake's mind froze at that point, froze so hard on the thought that came that a pain stabbed through his head. He shook himself. He thought: "It was impossible! An engine that merely turned an axle in however wonderful a fashion wasn't a spaceship drive whatever else it might be."

No, no—the situation was really simple. He had crept away into this little cottage of his, almost right out of the world. Life had gone on dynamically; and somewhere not so long ago a tremendous invention had spawned out of that surging tide of will and ambition and creative genius.

Tomorrow he would try to get a mortgage on this cottage; that would provide him with a little cash, and break forever the thrall of the place. Dandy he'd send over to Eleanor in the same fashion that she had sent him three years ago—without a word. The green pastures of the estate would be like heaven for an animal that had starved too long now on an ex-airman's pension. As for the engine—

He must have slept at that point. Because he woke up at 3:00 a.m., sweating with fear. He was out in the night and clawing open the door of the garage-stable—before realization penetrated that he had had a bad dream.

The engine was still there, the foot-long piece of piping in its force field. In the beam of his flashlight the piping glinted as it turned, shone with a brown glow that was hard to reconcile with the dirty, rusted, extruded metal thing he had ransacked out of his basement.

It struck Pendrake after a moment, and for the first time, that the pipe was turning far more slowly than had the piece of wood, not a quarter so fast, not more than fourteen or fifteen hundred revolutions per minute. The rate of rotation must be governed by the kind of material—based on atomic weight, or density, or something.

Slowly, conscious that he mustn't be seen abroad at this hour, Pendrake shut the door and returned to the house. He felt no anger at himself, or at the brief frenzy that sent him racing into the night. But the implications were troubling.

It was going to be hard to give the engine up to its rightful owner. Damned hard!

Forty issues of the weekly *Crescentville Clarion* yielded exactly nothing. Pendrake read the first two news pages of each edition, missing not a single heading. But there was no report of an air crash, no mention of a great new-engine invention.

He went out, finally, into the hot August morning, a haze of exhilaration tingling along his nerves. It couldn't be, it *couldn't* be; and yet—

If this kept on the engine was his.

The bank manager said: "A mortgage on the cottage! It isn't necessary. You have a large account here."

"Eh?" Pendrake said.

It was the expression on the man's smooth-jowled face, the faint, secret smile that warned him. The manager, whose name Pendrake remembered as Roderick Clay, said easily:

"As you know, when you went to China with the Army Air Force, you signed all your possessions over to your wife, with the exception of the cottage where you now live; and that, as I understand it, was omitted accidentally."

Pendrake nodded, not trusting himself to speak. He knew now what was coming; and the manager's words only verified his realization. The manager said:

"At the end of the war, a few months after you and your wife separated, she secretly reassigned to you the entire property, including bonds, shares, cash, real estate, as well as the Pendrake estate, with the stipulation that you not be advised of the transfer until you actually inquired, or in some other fashion indicated your need for money. She further stipulated that, in the interim, she be given a minimum living allowance with which to provide for the maintenance of herself and the Pendrake home.

"I may say"—the man was bland, smug, satisfied with the way he had carried off an interview that he must have planned in his idle moments with anticipatory thrills—"your affairs have prospered with those of the nation. Stocks, bonds and cash on hand total about two hundred and ninety-four thousand dollars. Would you like me to have one of the clerks draw up a check for your signature? How much?"

It was hotter outside. Pendrake walked back to the cottage, thinking: He should have known Eleanor would pull something like that. These passionate, introvert women—Sitting there that day he had called, cold, remote, unable to break out of her shell of reserve—sitting there knowing she had placed herself financially at his mercy.

He'd have to think out the implications, plan his approach, his exact words, actions—meanwhile there was the engine.

It was still there. He glanced cursorily in at it, then padlocked the door again. On the way to the kitchen entrance he patted Dandy, who was staked out on the back lawn.

Inside, he searched for, and found, the name of a Washington patent firm. He'd gone to China with the son of a member. Awkwardly, he wrote his letter. On his way to the post office to mail it, he stopped off at the only machine shop in town and ordered a wheellike gripping device, a sort of clutch, the wheel part of which would whirl with anything it grasped.

The answer to his letter arrived two days later, before the "clutch" was completed. The letter said:

DEAR MR. PENDRAKE: As per your request, we placed the available members of our Research Department on your problem. All patent office records of engine inventions during the past three years were examined. In addition, I had a personal conversation with the director in charge of that particular

department of the patent office. Accordingly, I am in a position to state positively that no radical engine inventions have been patented in any field since the war.

For your perusal, we are inclosing herewith copies of ninety-seven recent engine patents, as selected by our staff from thousands.

Our bill is being sent to you by separate mail. Thank you for your advance check for two hundred dollars.

Sincerely yours,

N. V. HOSKINS.

P. S.: I thought you were dead. I'll swear I saw your name in a casualty list after I was rescued, and I've been mourning you for three years. I'll write you a longer letter in a week or so. I'm holding up the patent world right now, not physically—only the great Jim Pendrake could do a stunt like that. However, I'm playing the role of mental Atlas, and I sure got a lot of dirty looks rushing your stuff through. Which explains the big bill. 'By for now.

NED.

Pendrake was conscious of a choking sensation as he read and reread the note. To think how he'd cut himself off from his friends, all those grand fellows—

The phrase—"the great Jim Pendrake" made him glance involuntarily at the empty right sleeve of his sweater.

He smiled grimly; and several minutes passed before he remembered the engine. He thought then: "I'll order an automobile chassis and an engineless plane, and a bar made of many metals—have to make some tests first, of course, and—"

He stopped, his eyes widening with the possibilities. Life was sure opening up. The only thing was—

It was strangely hard to realize that the engine still had no owner but himself.

"What's that?" said a young man's voice behind Pendrake.

It was growing quite dark; and the truck he had hired seemed almost formless in the gathering night. Beside Pendrake the machine shop loomed, a gloomy, unpainted structure. The lights inside the building glimmered faintly through greasy windows.

The machine-shop employees, who had loaded the gripper on the truck for him, were gone through a door, their raucous good nights still ringing in his ears.

Pendrake was alone with his questioner.

With a deliberate yet swift movement he pulled a tarpaulin over the gripper—and turned to stare at the man who had addressed him.

The fellow stood in the shadows, a tall, powerful-looking young man. The light from the nearest street lamp, glinted on

high, curving cheekbones, but it was hard to make out the exact contours of the face.

It was the utter lack of casualness in the man that sent a chill through Pendrake. Here was no idler's curiosity, but an earnestness, a determination that was startling.

With an effort, Pendrake caught himself. "What's it to you?" he said curtly.

He climbed into the cab: the engine purred. Awkwardly, Pendrake manipulated the right-hand gear shift and rolled off.

He could see the man in his rearview mirror, still standing there in the shadows of the machine shop, a tall, strong figure. The fellow started to walk slowly in the same direction that Pendrake was driving. The next second Pendrake whipped the truck around a corner and headed down a side street.

Roundabout, he thought, take a roundabout course to his cottage, then swiftly return the truck to the man from whom he'd rented it, and then—

Something damp trickled down his cheek. He let go the steering wheel and felt his face. It was covered with sweat.

He sat very still, then: "Am I crazy?" he thought. "It's impossible that someone can be secretly searching for the engine."

His jumpy nerves slowly quietened. What was finally convincing was the coincidence of such a searcher standing near a machine shop of a small town at the very instant that Jim Pendrake was there. It was like an old melodrama where the villains were dogging the unsuspecting hero.

Ridiculous!

Nevertheless, the episode emphasized an important aspect of his possession of the engine: Somewhere that engine had been built. Somewhere was the owner.

He must never forget that.

It was darker when he was finally ready. Pendrake entered the garage-stable and turned on the light he had rigged earlier in the day. The two-hundred-watt bulb shed a sunlike glare that somehow made the small room even stranger than it had been by lantern light.

The engine stood exactly where he had nailed it three nights before. It stood there like a swollen tire for a small, broad wheel; like a large, candied, blue-gray doughnut.

Except for the four sets of flanges and the size, the resemblance to a doughnut was genuinely startling. The walls curved upward from the hole in the center; the hole itself was only a little smaller than it should

have been to be in exact proportion. But there the resemblance to anything whatsoever ended.

That hole was the damndest thing that ever was.

It was about six inches in diameter. Its inner walls were smooth, translucent, non-metallic in appearance; and in its geometrical center floated the piece of plumber's pipe. Literally, the pipe hung there in space, held in position by a force that seemed to have no origin, a force, oh—

Pendrake drew a deep slow breath, picked up his hammer and gently laid it over the outjutting end of the pipe. The hammer throbbed in his hand, but grimly he bore the pulsing needles of resuscitated pain—and pressed.

The pipe whirred on, unyielding, unaffected. The hammer *brrred* with vibration. Pendrake grimaced from the agony and jerked the tool free.

He waited patiently till his hand ceased throbbing, then struck the protruding end of pipe a sharp blow. The pipe receded into the hole, and nine inches of it emerged from the other side of the engine.

It was almost like rolling a ball.

With deliberate aim Pendrake hit the pipe from the far side. It bounced back so easily that eleven inches of it flowed out, only an inch remaining in the hole.

It spun on like the shaft of a steam turbine, only there was not even a whisper of sound, not the faintest hiss.

Thoughtfully, his face dark, Pendrake sagged back and sat on his heels. The engine was not perfect. The ease with which the pipe and, originally, the piece of wood had been pushed in and out meant that gears or something would be needed—something that would hold steady at high speeds under great strains.

Pendrake climbed slowly to his feet, utterly intent now. He dragged into position the device he had had constructed by the machine shop. It took several minutes to adjust the gripping wheel to the right height. But his patience had a mindless quality.

Finally, however, he manipulated the control lever. Fascinated, he watched the two halves of the wheel close over the one-inch pipe, grip and begin to spin.

A glow suffused his whole body. It was the sweetest, purest pleasure that had touched him in three long years. Gently, Pendrake pulled on the gripping machine, tried to draw it toward him along the floor.

It didn't budge.

He frowned at it. He had the feeling that the machine was too heavy for delicate pressures. Muscle was needed here, and without restraint.

Bracing himself, he began to tug, hard.

Afterward, he remembered flinging himself back toward the door in a frenzy of physical effort. He had a distinct mental picture of the nails that held the engine to the floor pulling out as the engine toppled over toward him.

The next instant the engine *lifted*, lifted lightly in some incomprehensible fashion right off the floor. It whirled there for a moment slowly, propeller-fashion, then fell heavily on top of the gripping machine.

With a crash the wooden planks on the floor splintered. The cement underneath, the original floor of the garage, shattered with a horrible grinding noise as the gripping machine was smashed against it fourteen hundred times a minute.

Metal squealed in torment and broke into pieces in a shattering hail of death. The confusion of sound and dust and spraying concrete and metal was briefly a hideous environment for Pendrake's stunned mind.

Silence crept over the scene like the night following a day of battle, an intense, unnatural silence. There was blood on Dandy's quivering flank, where something had struck with gashing effect. Pendrake stood, soothing the trembling horse, assessing the extent of the destruction.

He saw that the engine was lying on its face, apparently unaffected by the violence it had precipitated with such a casual display of stupendous power. It lay, a glinting, blue-gray thing in the light from the miraculously untouched electric bulb.

It took half an hour to find all the pieces of what had been the gripping machine. He gathered the parts one by one and took them into the house.

The first real experiment with the machine was over, successfully.

He sat in darkness in the kitchen, watching. The minutes ticked by, a calm succession; and there was still no movement outside. Pendrake sighed finally. It was clear that no one had noticed or heard the cataclysm in his garage. Or if they had they didn't give a damn.

The engine was safe.

The easing tension brought a curious awareness of how lonely he was. Suddenly, the very restfulness of the silence oppressed him. He had an abrupt, sharp conviction

that his developing victory over the engine wasn't going to be any fun for one man cut off from the world by the melancholia in his character.

He thought drably: He ought to go and see her.

No—he shook himself—come to think of it, that wouldn't work. A genuine introvert like Eleanor acquired an emotional momentum in a given direction. Getting her out of that involved forces similar to the basic laws of hypnoism. The more direct the pressure to change her, the greater would be her innate resistance.

Even if she herself willed to be free, the more determined she became about it, the more deeply she would become involved in the morass of emotions that was her psychic prison. Definitely, it wouldn't do any good to go and see her, but—

Pendrake put on his hat and went out into the night. At the corner drugstore, he headed straight for the phone booth.

"Is Mrs. Pendrake in?" he asked quietly when his call was answered.

"Yes, suh!" The woman's deep voice indicated that there was at least one new servant at the big white house; it was not a familiar voice. "Just a moment, suh."

A few seconds later, Eleanor's rich contralto was saying: "Mrs. Pendrake speaking."

"Eleanor, this is Jim."

"Yes!" Pendrake smiled wanly at the tiny change in her tone, the defensive edge that was suddenly in it.

"I'd like to come back, Eleanor," he said softly.

There was silence, then—

Click!

Out in the night again, Pendrake looked up at the starry heavens. The sky was dark, dark blue; the whole fabric of the universe of Occidental earth was well settled into night. Crescentville shared with the entire Eastern seaboard the penumbral shadows of the great mother planet.

He thought: Maybe it had been a mistake, but now she knew. Her mind had probably gone dead slow on thoughts about him. Now it would come alive again.

He strolled up the back alley to his cottage; and, reaching the yard, suppressed an impulse to climb the tree from which the big white house was visible.

He flung himself on the cool grass of the back lawn, stared at the garage stable and—

An engine, he thought shakily, an engine that would spin anything shoved into it

force field or, if it resisted, smash it with the ease of power unlimited. An engine through which a shaft could be *pushed*, but from which it could not be *pulled*. Which meant that an airplane propeller need only be fastened to a bar of graded metals—graded according to atomic weight and density, and—

Someone was knocking at the front door of the cottage. Pendrake jumped physically and mentally—and then took the telegram from the boy who had disturbed him. The telegram read:

CABIN MODEL PUMA DELIVERED
TO DORMANTOWN AIRPORT TO-
MORROW STOP SPECIAL ENGINE
BRACES AND CONTROLS MAGNESIUM
ALLOY AND AEROGEL PLASTIC CON-
STRUCTION

ATLANTIC AIRCRAFT CORP.

Never, never, never had he been in a plane so fast. All the military machines he'd ever flown, the Lightnings, the Mustangs, Pumas, did not compare even remotely to the machine that quivered like vibrating bar steel before the power of the engine of dreams.

The plane seemed to have no connection with earth. It was a creature of the sky, an arrow discharged by Jove—and when he finally brought it down, Pendrake sat in the control seat, eyes closed, tugging his soul down from the upper heavens, where it had roamed a free spirit.

He sat finally, sobered by the tremendous success. Because—what now?

He could take other flights, of course, but sooner or later his machine, in its silent journeyings, would be remarked. And every day that passed, every hour that he clung to this secrecy, his moral position would grow worse.

Somebody owned the engine. Owned it and wanted it. He must decide once and for all whether or not to advertise his possession of it; to do something decisive, to—

He found himself frowning at the four men who were coming toward him along the line of sheds. Two of them were carrying between them a large tool case and one was pulling a small wagon which had other material on it.

The men stopped fifty feet from Pendrake's plane. The fourth man came forward, fumbling in his pocket. He knocked on the cabin door.

Pendrake hesitated, cursing silently. He

had been told, absolutely assured, that no one else had rented a plane garage at this end of the field, and that the big sheds nearby were empty, for use in future years only.

Impatient, he actuated the lever that opened the door. "What—" he began.

He stopped, choked a little. He stared at the revolver that glittered at him from a hand that was rock steady, then glanced up at a face that—he saw with a start now—was covered by a flesh mask.

"Get out of there."

As Pendrake climbed to the ground the man backed warily out of arm's reach and the other men ran forward, pulling their wagon, carrying their tools. They stowed the stuff into the plane and climbed in. The man with the gun paused in the doorway, drew a package out of the breast pocket of his coat and tossed it at Pendrake's feet.

"That'll pay you for the plane. And remember this, you will only make yourself look ridiculous if you pursue this matter further. This engine is in an experimental stage. We want to explore all its possibilities before we apply for a patent, and we don't intend to have simple secondary patents, improvements and what not hindering our personal development of the invention. That's all."

The plane began to move. In a minute it was lifting. It became a speck in the western sky and was merged into the blue haze of distance.

The thought that came finally to Pendrake was: His decision had been made for him.

His sense of loss grew. And his blank feeling of helplessness. For a while he watched the local planes taking off and landing on the northern runway; a mindless watch it was that left him after ten minutes still without a plan or purpose.

He could go home. He pictured himself sneaking into his cottage in Crescentville like a whipped dog, with the long, long evening still ahead of him.

Or—the dark thought knit his brow—he could go to the police. The impulse jarred deeper and brought his first memory of the package that had been thrown at his feet.

He stooped, picked it off the cement, tore it open and counted the green bills inside. When he had finished he mustered a wry smile. A hundred dollars more than he had paid for the Puma.

There was, of course, the fact that it was a forced sale, and—

With abrupt decision Pendrake started the engine of his borrowed truck and headed for the Dormantown station of the State police.

His doubts returned with a rush as the police sergeant, half an hour later, gravely noted down his charge.

"You found the engine, you say?" The policeman reached that point finally.

"Yes."

"Did you report your find to the Crescentville branch of the State police?"

Pendrake hesitated. It was utterly impossible to explain the instinctive way he had covered up his possession of the engine without the engine as evidence of how unusual a find it was." He said at last:

"I thought at first it was a piece of junk. When I discovered it wasn't I quickly learned that no such loss had been reported. I decided on the policy of finders keepers."

"But the rightful owners now have it?"

"I would say so, yes," Pendrake admitted. "But their use of guns, their secrecy, the way they forced me to sell the plane convinces me I ought to press the matter."

The policeman made a note, then: "Can you give me the manufacturer's number of the engine?"

Pendrake groaned. He went out finally into the gathering dusk feeling that he had fired a dud shot into impenetrable night.

He reached Washington by the morning plane from Dormantown and went at once to the office of Hoskins, Kendlon, Baker & Hoskins, patent attorneys. A moment after his name had been sent in, a slim, dandified young man broke out of a door and came loping across the anteroom.

Oblivious of the startled amazement of the reception clerk, he cried in an intense voice:

"The Air Force's Man of Steel, Jim, I—"

He stopped. His blue eyes widened. Some of the color went out of his cheeks and he stared with a stricken look at Pendrake's empty sleeve. Silently, he pulled Pendrake into his private office. He muttered:

"The man who pulled knobs off doors when he was in a hurry and crushed anything in his hands when he got excited—" He shook himself, threw off the gloom with an effort. "How's Eleanor, Jim?"

Pendrake had known the beginning was going to be hard; as briefly as possible, he explained: "—you know what she was like. She held that job in the research department of the Hilliard Encyclopedia Co., an

out-of-the-world existence that I pulled her away from, and—”

He finished after a moment and plunged instantly into a detailed account of the engine. By the time he reached the end of his story, Hoskins was pacing the office floor.

“A secret group with a new, marvelous engine invention. Jim, this sounds big to me. I’m well connected with the Air Force and know Commissioner Blakeley. But there’s no time to waste. Have you plenty of money?”

Pendrake nodded doubtfully. “I guess so.”

“I mean, we can’t waste time on red tape. Can you lay out five thousand dollars for the electron image camera? You know, the one that was invented just at the end of the war? Maybe you’ll get your money back, maybe you won’t. The important thing is that you go to that hillside where you found the engine and photograph the soil electrons. We must have a picture of that engine to convince the type of cynic that’s beginning to show himself in town again, the fellow who won’t believe anything he doesn’t see, and gives you a sustained runaround if you can’t show him.

The man’s excitement was contagious. Pendrake jumped up. “I’ll leave at once. Where can I get one of those cameras?”

“There’s a firm in town that sells them to the government and to various educational institutes for geologic and archæologic purposes. Now, look, Jim, I hate to rush you like this, I’d like you to come home and meet my wife, but time is of the essence in those photographs. That soil is exposed to the light, and the image will be fuzzing.

“I’ll be seeing you,” Pendrake said, and started for the door.

The prints came out beautifully clear, the image of the engine unmistakable. Pendrake was sitting in his living room admiring the glossy finish when the girl from the telephone office knocked.

“There’s a long-distance call for you from New York,” she said. “The party is waiting. Will you come to the exchange?”

“Hoskins,” thought Pendrake, though what the man was doing in New York—

The first sound of the stranger voice on the phone chilled him. “Mr. Pendrake,” it said quietly, “we have reason to believe that you are still attached to your wife. It would be regrettable if anything should happen to her as a result of your meddling in some-

thing that does not concern you. Take heed.”

There was a click. The sharp little sound was still echoing in Pendrake’s mind minutes later as he walked blankly along the street.

Only one thing stood out clear: The search, the investigation, was over.

The days dragged. For the first time it struck Pendrake that it was the engine that had galvanized him out of his long torpor. And that he had launched on the search as swiftly as he had because deep inside of him had been the realization that without the engine he would have nothing.

It was worse than that. He tried to resume the old tenor of his existence. And he couldn’t. The almost mindless rides on Dandy that once had lasted from dawn to dark ended abruptly before 10:00 a.m. on two successive days. And were not resumed.

It wasn’t that he no longer wanted to go riding. It was simply life was more than an idler’s dream. The three years’ sleep was over.

On the fifth day a telegram arrived from Hoskins:

WHAT’S THE MATTER? I’VE BEEN
EXPECTING TO HEAR FROM YOU.
NED.

Uneasily, Pendrake tore the message to shreds. He intended to answer it, but he was still cudgeling his brain over the exact wording of his reply two days later when the letter arrived:

—cannot understand your silence. I have interested Air Commissioner Blakeley, and some technical staff officers have already called on me. In another week I’ll look like a fool. You bought the camera; I checked up on that. You must have the pictures, so for Pete’s sake let me hear from you—

Pendrake answered that:

I am dropping the case. I am sorry that I bothered you with it, but I have found out something which completely transforms my views on the affair, and I am not at liberty to reveal what it is.

Wouldn’t reveal it would have been the truth, but it would be inexpedient to say so. These active Air Force officers—he had been one of them in his time—couldn’t yet have got into their systems that peace was radically different from war. The threat to Eleanor would merely make them impatient; her death or injury would consti-

tute a casualty list so minor as to be beneath consideration. Naturally, they would take precautions, but—

To hell with them.

On the third day after he sent the letter, a taxi drew up before the gate of the cottage; and Hoskins and a bearded giant climbed out.

Pendrake let them in, quietly acknowledged the introduction to the great Blakeley, and sat cold before the storm of questions. After ten minutes, Hoskins was as white as a sheet.

"I can't understand it," he raved. "You took the photos, didn't you?"

No answer.

"How did they come out?"

Silence.

"This thing you learned that transformed your views, did you obtain further information as to who is behind the engine?"

The anguished thought that came to Pendrake was that he should have lied outright in his letter. Such a stupid compromise of a statement he had made, which could not but fail to arouse intense curiosity, had produced this agony of interrogation as surely as—

"Let me talk to him, Hoskins." It was Commissioner Blakeley, and Pendrake felt a distinct relief. A stranger couldn't be worse. He saw that Hoskins was shrugging as he seated himself on the chesterfield and nervously lighted a cigarette.

The big man began in a cool, deliberate tone: "I think what we have here is a psychological case. Pendrake, do you remember that fellow who in 1936 or thereabouts claimed to have an engine that got its power from the air? When the reporters swarmed over his car they found a carefully concealed battery.

"And then," the cold, biting voice went on, "there was the woman who, two years ago, claimed to have seen a German submarine in Lake Ontario. Her story got wilder and wilder as the navy's investigation progressed, and finally she admitted she had told the story to friends to rouse interest in herself, and when the publicity started she didn't have the nerve to tell the truth. Now, in your case, you're being smarter. You—"

The extent of the insult brought a twisted smile to Pendrake's face. He stood like that staring at the floor, listening almost idly to the verbal humiliation he was being subjected to. He felt so remote from the ham-

mering voice that his surprise was momentarily immense as two gigantic hands grabbed his lapels and the handsome, bearded face poked belligerently into his and the scathing voice blared:

"That's the truth, isn't it?"

He hadn't thought of himself as being wrought up. He had no sense of rage as, with an impatient sweep of his hand he broke the big man's double grip on him, whirled him around, caught him by the scruff of his coat and carried him, kicking and shouting in amazement, into the hallway and through the screen door onto the verandah.

There was a wild moment as Blakeley was heaved onto the lawn below; he came to his feet bellowing. But Pendrake was already turning away. In the doorway he met Hoskins. Hoskins had his coat and bowler hat. He said in a level voice:

"I'm going to remind you of something—" He intoned the words of the great pledge of men of honor; and he couldn't have known that he had won because he walked down the steps without looking back. The waiting taxi was gone before Pendrake grasped how completely those final words had defeated his own purpose.

That night he wrote the letter to Eleanor. He followed it the next day at the hour he had named: 3:30 p.m.

When the plump Negress opened the door of the big white house, Pendrake had the fleeting impression that he was going to be told that Eleanor was out.

But she wasn't. He was led through the familiar halls into the forty-foot living room. The Venetian blinds were drawn against the sun; and so it took a moment for Pendrake to make out in the gloom the figure of the lithe young woman who had risen to meet him.

Her voice came, rich, familiar, questioning, out of the dimness: "Your letter was not very explanatory. However, I had intended to see you anyway, but never mind that. What danger am I in?"

He could see her more clearly now. And for a moment he could only stand there, drinking her in with his eyes her slim body, every feature of her face and the dark hair that crowned it. Abruptly, he grew aware that she was flushing under his intense scrutiny. Quickly, he began his explanation.

"My intention," he said, "was to drop the whole affair. But just as I thought I had ended the matter by tossing Blakeley out,

I was reminded by Hoskins of my Air Force oath to my country."

"Oh!"

"For your own safety," he went on, more decisive now, "you must leave Crescentville for the time being, lose yourself in the vastness of New York until this matter has been probed to the bottom."

"I see!" Her dark gaze was non-committal. She looked oddly stiff, sitting in the chair she had chosen, as if she was not quite at ease. She said at last:

"The voices of the two men who spoke to you, the gunman and the man on the phone—what were they like?"

Pendrake hesitated: "One was a young man's voice, the other middle-aged."

"No, I don't mean that. I mean the texture, the command of language, the degree of education."

"Oh!" Pendrake stared at her. He said slowly: "I hadn't thought of that. Very well educated, I should say."

"English?"

"No, American."

"That's what I meant. Nothing foreign, though?"

"Not the slightest."

They were both, Pendrake realized, more at ease now; and he felt a wondering delight at the cool way she was facing her danger. After all, she wasn't trained to face down physical terrors; and being an introvert wouldn't help her any. Before he could think further, she said:

"This engine—what kind is it? Have you any idea?"

Did he have any idea! He who had racked his brain into the dark watches of a dozen nights!

"It must," said Pendrake carefully, "have grown out of a tremendous background of research. Nothing so perfect could spring full grown into existence without a mighty base of other men's work to build on. Though even with that, somebody must have had an inspiration of purest genius."

He finished quietly: "It's an atomic engine, I should say. It can't be anything else. There's no other comparable background."

She was staring at him, looking not quite sure of her next words. She said at last in a formal voice: "You don't mind my asking these questions?"

He knew what *that* meant. She had suddenly become aware that she was thawing

—and instantly froze. He thought: "Oh, damn these sensitives." He said quickly, earnestly:

"You have already cleared up some important points. Just where they will lead is another matter. Can you suggest anything else?"

There was silence, then: "I realize," she said slowly, "that I am not properly qualified. I have no scientific knowledge, but I do have my research training. I don't know whether my next question is foolish or not, but—what is the decisive date for atomic energy?"

Pendrake frowned, said: "I think I see what you mean. What is the latest date that an atomic engine **COULDN'T** have been developed?"

"Something like that," she agreed, bright-eyed.

Pendrake was thoughtful. "I've been reading up on it lately. 1938 might fit—but 1940 is more likely."

"Ten years?"

Pendrake nodded. He knew what she was going to say, and that it was excellent, but he waited for her to say it. She did, after a moment:

"Is there any way you can check up on the activities of every able person who has done atomic research in this country during that time?"

He inclined his head. "I'll go first," he said, "to my old physics professor. He's one of those perpetually young old men who keep abreast of everything. He—"

Her voice, steady, cool, cut him off: "You're going to pursue this search in person?"

She glanced involuntarily at his right sleeve as she finished, then flushed scarlet; and there was no doubt of the memory that was in her mind. Pendrake said swiftly, but with a wan smile:

"I'm afraid there's no one else. As soon as I've made a little progress I'll go to Blakeley and apologize for treating him as I did. Until then, right arm or not, I doubt if there's anyone more capable than I am."

He frowned. "Of course, there is the fact that a one-armed man is easily spotted."

She had control of herself again. "I was going to suggest that you obtain an artificial arm and a flesh mask. Those people must have worn civilian masks if you recognized the disguise so quickly. You can secure the perfect, soldier's type."

She stood up and finished in a level voice:

"As for leaving Crescentville, I had already written my old firm, and they are hiring me in my former position. That was what I intended to see you about. I shall leave the house secretly tonight, and by tomorrow you should be free to pursue your investigations. Good luck."

They faced each other, Pendrake shocked to his core by the abrupt termination of the meeting, and by her words. They parted like two people who have been under enormous strain.

"And that," Pendrake thought as he stood out in the sun's glare, "was the truth."

It was after midnight, September 8th. Pendrake walked, head bent, into a strong east wind along a well-lighted street in the Riverdale section of New York City. He peered at the numbers of the houses as he pressed by: 418, 420, 432.

No. 432 was the third house from the corner; and he walked on past it to the lightpost. Back to the wind, he stood in the bright glow, once more studying his precious list—a final verification.

His original intention had been to investigate every one of the seventy-three eastern Americans on that list, starting with the A's.

But second thought brought the shrewd realization that scientists of firms like Westinghouse, the Rockefeller Foundation, private laboratories with small means, and physicists and professors who were carrying on individual research, were the least likely candidates, the former because of the impossibility of secrecy, the latter because that engine *must* have plenty of money behind it.

Which left three private foundations, by far the wealthiest of these being the Lambton Institute, whose distinguished executive physicist, Dr. McClintock Grayson, lived in the third house from the corner.

He reached the front door of the darkened residence, and experienced his first disappointment. In a dim way he had hoped the door would be unlocked. It wasn't; and that meant all the doors he had opened in his life without ever noticing they were locked would now have to be precedents, proofs that a Yale lock could be broken silently. It seemed different doing it on purpose, but—

Tensing himself, he gripped the knob. And went forward. The lock broke with the tiny click of metal that has been abruptly subjected to unbearable pressure.

In the inky hallway, Pendrake stood for a moment listening. But the only sound was the pounding of his heart. He went forward cautiously, using his flashlight as he peered into doors.

A minute of search verified that the study must be on the second floor. He took the stairs four at a time.

The hallway of the second floor was large with five closed doors and two open ones leading from it. The first open door led to the bedroom; the second—

Pendrake sighed with relief as he tiptoed into a large, cozy room lined with bookshelves. There was a desk in one corner, a small filing cabinet and several floor lamps.

After one swift look he closed the door behind him and turned on the trilight beside the chair next to the desk.

Once again he waited, listening with every nerve tensed. From somewhere near came a faint, regular breathing. But that was all.

The menage of Dr. Grayson was resting peacefully from its day's labors, which—Pendrake reflected as he seated himself at the desk—was where they ought to be. It would be utterly unfair of fate to let him be interrupted now.

At two o'clock he had his man. The proof was a scrawled note, abstracted from a mass of irrelevant papers that cluttered one drawer. It read:

The pure mechanics of the engine's operation depends on revolutions per minute. At very low r. p. m., i. e. fifty to one hundred, the pressure will be almost entirely on a line vertical to the axial plane. If weights have been accurately estimated, a machine will at this stage lift buoyantly, but the forward movement will be almost zero—

Pendrake paused there, puzzled. It couldn't be anything but *the* engine that was being discussed. But what did it mean? He read on:

As the number of r. p. m. increases, the pressure will shift rapidly toward the horizontal, until, at above five hundred revolutions, the pull will be along the axial plane—and all counter or secondary pressure will have ceased. It is at this stage that the engine can be pushed along a shaft, but not pulled. The field is so intense that—

The reference to the shaft was ultimately convincing. Only too well he remembered his own violent discovery that the shaft could not be pulled out of the engine.

The atomic wizard of the age was Dr. Grayson.

Quite suddenly, Pendrake felt weak, ill. He lay back in his chair, strangely dizzy. He thought: "Got to get out of here. Now that I know, I can't take another instant's risk of being caught."

The wild triumph came as the front door closed behind him. He walked down the street, his mind soaring with such a drunken exultancy that he swayed like an intoxicated person.

He was eating breakfast at a lunch counter a mile away when the reaction finally came: So Dr. Grayson, famous *savant*, was the man behind the marvellous engine!

So what now?

In the morning he phoned Hoskins long distance. "It was impossible," he thought, as he waited for the call to be put through, "that he carry on with this tremendous business all by himself.

"If anything should happen to him, what he had discovered would dissolve into the great darkness, perhaps never to be reconstituted. After all, he was here because he had taken to heart a timeless oath of allegiance to his country, an oath that he had not, until reminded, considered relevant—"

His reverie ended as the operator said: "Mr. Hoskins refuses to accept your call, sir."

His problem seemed as old as his existence. As he sat in the hotel library that afternoon, his mind kept coming back to the aloneness of his position, the reality that all decisions about the engine were his to make and his to act upon.

What an incredible fool he was! He ought to put the whole miserable business out of his mind and go to a movie. Or return to Crescentville. The property there would need attention before winter.

But, shuddering, he knew he wouldn't go. What would he do in that lonely town during the long days and the long nights of the coming years?

There was only the engine. All his interest in life, his rebirth of spirit dated from the moment that he had found the doughnut-shaped thing. Without the engine or rather—he made the qualification consciously—without the search for the engine

he was a lost soul, wandering aimlessly through the eternity that was being on earth.

After a timeless period he grew aware suddenly of the weight of the book in his hands and remembered his purpose in coming to the library. The book was the 1948 edition of the *Hilliard Encyclopedia*, and it revealed that Dr. McClintock Grayson had been born in 1897, that he had one daughter and two sons, and that he had made notable contributions to the fission theory of atomic science.

Of Cyrus Lambton, the *Encyclopedia* said:

—manufacturer, philanthropist, he founded the Lambton Institute in 1936. Since the war, Mr. Lambton has become actively interested in a Back to the Land Movement, the uniquely designed headquarters for this project being located at—

Pendrake went out finally into the warm September afternoon and bought a car. His days became a drab routine. Watch Grayson come out of his house in the morning, follow him till he disappeared into the Lambton Building, trail him home at night.

It seemed endless, purposeless, hopeless. The world became a pattern of gray streets unreeling. He felt himself a wheel turning over and over on its axle, turning, turning, because it was easier to do that than to decide what else his life was good for.

On the seventeenth day the routine broke like a wave striking a wedge of rock. At one o'clock in the afternoon Grayson emerged briskly from the aerogel plastic structure that was the post-war abode of the Lambton Foundation.

The hour in itself was startling. But immediately the difference of this day to the others showed even more clearly. The scientist ignored his gray sedan parked beside the building, walked half a block to a taxi stand, and was driven to a twin-towered building on Fiftieth Street; a plastoglitte sign splashed across the two towers:

CYRUS LAMBTON LAND SETTLEMENT PROJECT

As Pendrake watched, Grayson dismissed the taxi; and disappeared through a revolving door into one of the broad-based towers.

Puzzled, but vaguely excited, Pendrake

sauntered to a window that had a large glitter sign on it. The sign read:

THE
CYRUS LAMBTON PROJECT

wants earnest, sincere young couples who are willing to work hard to establish themselves on rich soil in a verdant and wonderful climate.

Former farmers, sons of farmers and their daughters-of-farmers' wives are especially welcome. No one who desires proximity to a city or who has relatives he must visit need apply. Here is a real opportunity under a private endowment plan.

Three more couples wanted today for the latest allotment, which will close shortly under the monitorship of Dr. McClintock Grayson. Office open until 11 p.m.

HURRY!

It seemed utterly meaningless, without connection to an engine lying on a hillside. But it brought a thought that wouldn't go away; a thought that was really product of an urge that had been pressing at him for all the dreary days now past.

For an hour he fought the impulse, then it grew too big for his brain, and projected down into his muscles, carried him unresisting to a phone booth.

A minute later he was dialing the number of the Hilliard Encyclopedia Co.

There was a moment while she was being called to the phone. He thought a thousand thoughts, and twice he nearly hung up; and then:

"Jim, what's happened?"

The anxiety in her voice was the sweetest sound he had ever heard. Pendrake held himself steady as he explained what he wanted:

"—you'll have to get yourself an old coat and put on a cheap cotton dress or something; and I'll buy some secondhand things. All I want is to find out what is behind that land-settlement scheme. We could go in before dark this evening. A simple inquiry shouldn't be dangerous, and—"

His mind was blurred with the possibility of seeing her again; and so the uneasy idea of possible danger stayed deep inside him and did not rise to the surface until he saw her coming along the street.

She would have walked right past, but he stepped out and said:

"Eleanor!"

She stopped short; and looking at her it struck him for the first time that the slip of a girl he had married six years before was grown up. She was still slim enough

to satisfy any woman, but the richer contours of maturity were there, too. He grew aware that she was speaking:

"I forgot about the mask, and the artificial arm. They make you look almost—"

Pendrake smiled grimly. "Almost human, eh?"

He knew instantly that he had said the wrong thing. She turned as pale as gray metal. For a panicky moment it seemed to Pendrake that she was going to faint. He caught her arm, cried:

"I'm sorry, Eleanor. I'm a damned idiot. I ought to be shot."

"You had no right to say that," she breathed. "I know I was foolish that day three years ago when you returned from China. I ought not to have screamed when I saw your empty sleeve. But you should have written. You-should-have-written."

She made no move to withdraw her wrist from his fingers, and he could feel the violence of her trembling. He said in an intense voice:

"Eleanor, it was all my fault. My walking out on you in front of all those people—it was the damndest humiliation ever inflicted on a sensitive woman."

"You were overwrought from your terrible loss; and my scream—"

"I was a scoundrel. I deserve—"

He stopped because she was staring at him with a strange tenderness that made his mind reel. She said: "Let's forget it, Jim. And now, is that the building over there?"

"Eleanor, did you say—"

"We'll have to hurry if we intend to get in before it gets really dark."

"Eleanor, when you said 'let's forget it,' did you mean—"

But Eleanor stood staring across at the building, a complacent smile on her lips.

"Aerogel turrets," she mused aloud, "a hundred and fifty feet high; one completely opaque, windowless, doorless—I wonder what that means—and the other— We'll be Mr. and Mrs. Lester Cranston, Jim, of Winoha, Idaho. And we were going to leave New York tonight, but saw their sign. We'll love everything about their scheme—"

She started across the street; and Pendrake tagging along behind, reached the door with her before, in a single flash, his senses snapped back into position. In one comprehensive leap of mind he saw that it was his own emotional desire to see her that had brought her here.

"Eleanor," he said tensely, "we're not going in."

He should have known it would be useless to speak. Inside, he followed her with reluctant steps to a girl who sat at a spacious plastic desk in the center of the room. He was seated, before the glitter sign at the edge of the desk caught his eye:

MISS GRAYSON

Miss— What! Pendrake writhed in his chair, and then a vast uneasiness held him steady. Dr. Grayson's daughter! So the scientist's family was mixed up in this. It was even possible that two of the four men who had taken the plane from him had been his sons. And perhaps Lambton had some sons. He couldn't remember what the *Encyclopedia* had said about the children of Lambton.

In the intensity of his thoughts he was only dimly aware of the conversation between Eleanor and Grayson's daughter. But when Eleanor stood up he remembered that the talk had been of a psychological test in the back room.

Pendrake watched Eleanor walk across to the door that led to the second tower, and he was glad when, after about three minutes, Miss Grayson said:

"Will you go in now, Mr. Cranston?"

The door opened into a narrow corridor, and there was another door at the end of it. As his fingers touched the knob of the second door, a net fell over him and drew taut.

Simultaneously, a slot opened to his right. Dr. Grayson, a syringe in his fingers, reached through, pushed the needle into his right arm above the elbow; and then called over his shoulder to somebody out of sight:

"This is the last one, Peter. We can leave as soon as it gets dark."

The slot clicked shut.

Pendrake squirmed horribly; he fought there under that dim ceiling of light, striking against the net that held him. And every instant the terror grew, the terror that was in him, not for himself, but for Eleanor—Eleanor, who had gone through this door minutes before—

He would have cried out, but his rage was too great, his fear for her too near insanity. Eleanor, who had no artificial arm to take the shock of the dope from the syringe, and who—

He stopped the mad flame of thought by an effort so violent that his whole being shook. He must pretend to have succumbed. Only thus could he avoid another syringe

that might be more accurately aimed at a vital spot.

As he let himself slump, a voice said:

"That fellow fought too hard. You'll have to increase the dose for these powerful-looking men."

The words were Pendrake's first knowledge that his struggle had been observed. He let himself slump farther, and after a moment realized that the net was moving, lifting. A door opened in the ceiling and brightness pressed against his eyelids.

"Lay him down here beside his wife."

His body touched a softness that seemed to yield endlessly like a bottomless cushion; the net writhed and wriggled from under him; and suddenly it was gone.

The young man's voice said: "Look at this, he's severed four of the net strands. I thought this plastiwire was unbreakable."

The older man's voice came from a greater distance: "Strength is a curious quality. A dog can strain at a leash till it rots—or break it the first day if he lunges against it with enough snap. It—"

The scientist's voice faded curiously, as if he had gone into another room and closed the door.

Gradually, as Pendrake lay there, he grew aware of breathing around him, the slow, measured breathing of many people.

The sound, with all its implications of human beings still alive, eased the dreadful tightness in his throat. He slitted his eyes and saw that he was in a round metal room filled with scores of enormous hammocks that were suspended by cords attached both to the metal floor and the metal ceiling.

Twice, Pendrake slid his leg over with the intention of dropping to the floor. But each time a vague snatch of sound made him sink back and slow his breath into rhythm with that of the others.

He was preparing for his third effort when his body was struck a sharp, all-over blow. Beneath him the hammock sagged at least two feet, and there was an awful emptiness inside him, like the nausea of sustained hunger.

It was like that for a very long time, and actually there was no change in the fact. But his body grew accustomed to the relentless pressure. Finally, puzzled, he slid out of the voluminous folds of his hammock and dropped to the floor.

He fell hard. The violence of it strained his muscles, and there was a pressing weight on him that stunned because—he recognized it.

Acceleration! Fantastic, unimaginably great acceleration! He must be in a ship. That damnable second tower had contained a ship powered by atomic engines.

But what kind of a ship? What—

The thought faded as, with a blank will, he scrambled to his feet. There was a stairway leading to a closed door. But the door opened at his touch.

One lightning glance revealed the room was empty of human beings. There was a window that showed a black sky punctuated with stars, and in the room itself, mounted on rigid metal bars, eight engines were spinning.

For a moment, to his tensed mind, to his body concentrated on possible, stupendous danger, the scene seemed normal enough.

Engines; the number didn't matter. If one existed, so could eight; and their unlimited power could surely raise a ship out of a hundred-and-fifty-foot turret, though the speed of that rise in the night had been unnatural. Still, eight of those engines spinning—

The normalness shattered. Pendrake sent a glance wild with surmise at the engines. *The engines spinning* on rigid shafts and it should be the shafts that spun, not—

His memory flung back to the night in his stable when the engine had lifted with strange buoyancy from the floor, spun slowly and— How could he have missed the significance? How *could* he?

With a hissing intake of his breath he ran to the window. But the knowledge of what he would find was already in him. For a long moment he shivered with the physical daze of seeing interplanetary space, and then he drew his body and mind into closer union and was himself.

He reached the room where Dr. Grayson and the young man were lying in their hammocks. The latter he dealt one stunning blow—and tied them both with cords from their hammocks, tied them into their hammocks, wrapping the cords around and around.

There was silence in the control room. His mind felt far away, cold, joyless. His victory seemed somehow lacking. He couldn't quite place the missing factor, but perhaps it was the stunned expressions of the two prisoners.

Uncertain, Pendrake studied the small instrument board; he thought finally: "That

note I found in Dr. Grayson's study. All I've got to do is reduce the r.p.m. of the engines to less than five hundred; the pressure will gradually shift toward a line vertical to the axial plane and the spaceship will turn in a great circle and head back toward Earth."

But first— He glanced at the men and then he walked slowly to an expanse of transparent aerogel, and stood staring out into the velvet, light-sprinkled night.

The sun was a ghastly, flaring shape to his left. Pendrake said, without looking at the men:

"Where are you going? Mars, Venus, the Moon, or—"

He stopped. He couldn't help it. Mars, Venus— He felt dizzy, then electrified. The wonders of the skies! The only divine cognomens that would survive all the ages of religion!

"Which one?" Pendrake gasped. "Which planet?"

"Venus!"

The answer signed from the older man.

"We have a colony there. Quite a large one now. A ship with a hundred people leaves from one of our centers every three days—and there have been children."

Pendrake said sternly: "A hundred people kidnapped from Earth every three days—doped." He choked a little.

"Denilin sleep drug!" said Grayson. "Harmless, quick, no after effects. It saves simple people from their terror of something new like space. When they get to Venus they don't mind—"

"The planet is smaller, you know, than has been thought, not more than six thousand five hundred miles, more clouds high up, now below. But the brightness of the sun comes through—without the heat; and all the glories of Earth cannot compare with the treasure land that is Venus. No, they don't mind when they see— You must be Pendrake—that stiff right arm— We wondered whe—"

"Doped!" repeated Pendrake.

But the miasm of his fears was fading. There was greater uncertainty in his voice as he said:

"But why the secrecy? This great invention! Properly exploited it would be—"

"It would ruin everything!" It was the young man, his tone desperate. "Pendrake, we're not criminals. There are seventeen famous scientists and their families in this—the greatest names in atomic science. They

decided in 1944 when the engine was invented, when the war was already won, that the planets should not inherit the bitterness of Earth. Don't you see, a scramble for territory would be hell?

"Our plan is to establish the nucleus of a new nation, modeled after the United States; and every person who immigrates becomes—a Venusian."

It was several hours later that the spaceship landed on a darkened lot. Pendrake and Eleanor climbed to the ground and stood silently watching the torpedo-shaped spaceship merge with the clouded night sky.

The letter came to the big white house a week later:

Air Commissioner Blakeley has noted the names of the scientists you submitted, but feels that further correspondence with you would be fruitless.

Pendrake grinned at his wife. "Now, everybody's satisfied. I *had* to report it, of course, but"—his expression grew more thoughtful—"it is hard to believe the planets will have their chance because I tossed a loud-mouthed fool out on his ear one August afternoon."

The Renegade

By Marion Henry

In a way, he was a naturalized citizen of a very alien nation, a naturalized member of an alien race. It was hard to determine where his loyalties belonged. For he was something of a king among the aliens—

HARVEY LANE squatted just inside the door of the chief's thatched hut, his outward attention divided between the chief's laborious attempts to sew on a button belonging to Lane's only pair of shorts and the life in the village itself. Outwardly, it was little different from that of any other inland African community, though the cleanliness and the absence of a constant confused babble were strange, as was the lack of yapping cur dogs underfoot. But to anyone else, the huge females busy at their gardening or making the crude artifacts possible with the material at hand, the playing young, and the bulky guards squatting in the lower branches around would have been distinctly not normal.

Lane was used to it. In eight years a man can become completely accustomed to anything, even the sight of some hundreds of gorillas busy at work that would normally be men's. He knew every one of the hairy, heavily muscled apes out there, so well that he no longer saw their faces as ugly things, but as the individual countenances of friends and students. Now he leaned further back, brushing against a muscular shoulder while one of the bulls in the hut flicked a fan

back and forth to keep the flies off his hairless hide until the chief finished the sewing and he could put on his tattered shorts again.

Ajub, the chief, had been thinking; now he picked up the conversation again, his voice thick and slow, and the consonants sometimes distorted; but his speech in the English for which they had so gladly exchanged their own primitive, unexpressive tongue was no worse than could be found in parts of the larger man-cities. "It was about fifty years ago, I think, when we decided to come here and build a village away from all the blacks; we'd been trying to learn from them before that for maybe a hundred years, but all they showed for us was hatred, fear, and a desire to kill us and eat us, so we gave it up as hopeless; the harder we tried, the more afraid of us they became. And the one white man we'd seen before you came, hadn't been exactly friendly; he killed several of our tribe before we were forced to eliminate him and his group. Beyond that, our memory and our poor speech give no clue. Are these mutations really common, Lane?"

"Fairly, though I think they're a hit-or-

miss proposition, Ajub; it's a matter of blind luck when one is useful and dominant enough to be passed on." Lane reached toward the basket of dried fruits, and one of the gorillas handed it across, plucking an insect from the man's shirt carefully. "There must have been a lot of mutations running around the tribe before they all concentrated in the one offspring, and he passed that down, with his children spreading the combination further. Even then, it's hard to realize that you changed from a bunch of savage beasts like the other gorillas into a race at least as intelligent as man in less than five hundred years! Wish I knew more about the subject of mutations."

"Our good luck is that you know as much as you do about so many things. Before, we groped blindly for the truths without even realizing the order of nature, yet now we may be able to build on your knowledge, in time— Here, I can't do any better with these unskilled hands." The chief handed the shorts back, and his words concealed none of his pride in having accomplished it at all. While the younger members of the tribe were showing surprising dexterity; even to the learning of a fine style of script writing, the oldsters approached delicate work with much determination and little skill. "And if you're to have your supper, we'd better begin the hunt. What would you like?"

Lane considered. "Antelope, I guess; a good broiled antelope steak would be fine. And watch out for the cats."

He grinned at Ajub's grunt, and watched the massive apes go out after their leader, some armed with bows having two-hundred-pound pulls, others with the throwing sticks and spears Lane had taught them to make and use recently. Ajub carried the latter, and the man was well aware that the lions would stand small chance against such a combination of weapon, intelligence and muscle. He'd seen the chief toss the twelve-pound spear a good five hundred feet, to pierce cleanly through a full-grown lion and pin it to the earth on the other side. Antelope steaks for supper were a certainty.

He was useless on a hunt, being too weak and too clumsy, so he remained where he was, squatted comfortably in the sunlight, exchanging greetings with the few who passed the door of the hut, calling out occasional instructions to Ajub's youngest wife as she began grinding grain in a mortar. Off at the side, he could see a group of middle-aged bulls at work, slowly chipping and

burning out two heavy wooden wheels for a new cart, and he wished briefly that he could locate a vein of metal ore somewhere to give them better tools. Still, they almost made up in muscle for the quality of the instruments they used. Beyond, another younger bull was laboriously constructing a solid-log hut on pioneer lines to prove to a young female that he would make a fine mate. Lane leaned back against the frame of the door lazily, chewing on the sun-dried fruits.

The old days were gone; the play-boy reputation, the smutty divorce trial Linda had put him through, the drunken orgy of forgetfulness were all a part of some remote past. He'd been a failure there, as he'd been on the crazy hunting expedition into this country, and the still crazier idea of tracking down the legends of the blacks that dealt with the "wild men of the woods" without the help of experienced guides. He'd been such a fool that his only answer to the superstitious fears of the blacks had been the promise of more money later. Well, he learned better when he awoke to find himself alone, with only his rifle beside him, holding two forlorn cartridges.

Now that Harvey Lane was dead; he'd died while stumbling on in a fever that carried him into the little village of the gorillas, who'd tended and healed him before his delirium was over and he could realize they were other than normal. Here, now, Harvey Lane was greater even than the chief, the teacher of the young and the old who wanted avidly to learn, living in the chief's own hut and fed by the chief's spear. From early morning to mid-afternoon, he taught them all he could, and from then on he loafed or did as he pleased. The village was his to command, and the miserable failure had become the lord high priest of knowledge, who knew that the stars were other suns and that the dust under their feet was made up of countless atoms.

Little Tama entered the square, interrupting Lane's reverie as he came plunging toward the hut, dragging some heavy box behind him. "Teacher!"

"Not now, Tama. School's over. I'll tell you about germs again tomorrow. Go and play now." His largest trouble was in holding their eager minds to any reasonable limits—quite different from the problems of most of the teachers he had known.

But Tama was unwilling to be dismissed this time. He fidgeted, unhappy at disobey-

ing his oracle, but filled with the importance of what he had to tell. "Teacher, I found something! I think it's full of *books!*"

"*Huh?*" The only book in the village was a small first-aid handbook he'd had with him, almost worn out from too much handling. "Where, Tama?"

"In this box." The young ape ripped some of the boarding away further and pointed to the contents, throwing his hundred and fifty pounds about excitedly as Lane drew the object back inside the hut and examined it. It was a heavy wooden box, obviously from the outside world, judging by the letters that were now illegible, stamped onto the sides.

Quickly he indicated that Tama should pull all the cover off, his eyes darting down "*Encyclopedia Britannica!* Lord, Tama, they are books; they're the collection of all man's knowledge. Where'd you find this?"

"Dead black man came down river in a boat, like the boats that went up two months ago. I thought you'd like it, teacher, so I swam out and pulled it to the shore." His eyes darted up, and Lane nodded quick approval, knowing the aversion they felt toward the water. "The books were inside the boat, under the black man; I threw him away and brought the box to you."

Nothing is surprising in Africa; Lane had seen chiefs wearing alarm clocks tied around their heads for crowns, had met others with Oxford accents, and had stopped wondering at their idiosyncrasies; probably one had ordered the encyclopedia, only to have it stolen from him; or possibly it had been robbed from a safari under some white. Whatever its source, he was struck only by the singular good luck that had brought it drifting down the stream and sent little Tama out to collect it; here it was the treasure of all treasures.

"Good boy, Tama; Ajub himself will give you a spear for this, and I'll answer all your questions for a month. Anything else in the canoe?"

"A few things, teacher. The boat is on the river bank, if you want to look."

Lane nodded, following the pleased and excited little ape through the village toward the river. He nodded at the guards, received an answering grunt that told him the river trail was safe, and went on, picking up a child's spear that was light enough for him to handle. Normally, the river was deserted, but occasionally a canoe or more of blacks went up or down it, hurrying to get out of this country painted so darkly in their

superstitions; then the apes avoided showing themselves, or were careful to appear the simple brutes that they seemed.

Tama, he reflected, must have been disobeying orders when he sneaked out to watch the river while the guards knew from their outposts several miles up that there was a canoe coming. But they said nothing to the ape-child as they trotted down the trail, trying to imagine the expression on the chief's face when he returned and found a whole set of encyclopedia waiting for him. Lane had mentioned such books before often enough when his little fund of general knowledge was exhausted. Then the short trail ended, and Tama ran forward quickly, dragging the canoe further onto the bank.

"See, teacher. I only moved the black man and the box."

Mostly, the contents were such junk as any black native might acquire, bits of trade cloth, a few cheap beads, a copper bracelet, and a small collection of rotting foodstuff that Lane threw hastily into the river. Under that was the stained, dirty shoe of a white woman; a size three, too small for any native! He picked it up slowly, reluctantly turned it over in his hands without hearing the questioning babble of Tama. A silly little gold dancing slipper, size three Triple A, lost on this savage continent, carrying with it all the giddy folly of the woman who must have worn it once. A small, lithe woman, probably young, wearing a toeless shoe with a long spike heel, laughing and dancing in some white city, drinking and flirting, and gossiping as Linda had back in New York, when he'd been foolish enough to think she loved him instead of the fortune his father had left him.

For a moment, as he held it, he imagined that a trace of some faint feminine perfume lingered on it, over the stinking smell of the canoe. The illusion passed, but the memories caught at him and held, even when the shoe fell from his hand into the current of the water and went drifting off, sinking slowly. Girls, women, clubs, dances, parties—the rhythm of a jazz band, the laughter of a crowd, the excitement of New Year's Eve in Times Square, Madison Square Garden—the mocking twist of a girl's face avoiding a kiss she'd give willingly later; the rustle of silken cloth, and the smooth outlines of a feminine back in evening dress; the sound of a laugh coming from the bath as he waited for her; the sudden look that could pass between two people over a drink as they sat at a bar! Women, horse-races,

laughter, music—the purely human part of civilization!

"Teacher?" Tama's voice was puzzled, and he plucked at the man's sleeve doubtfully.

Lane straightened, brushing the silly tears from his eyes and trying vainly to kill the ache that ran through him, knowing he could not. "It's all right, Tama."

But he knew it wasn't. He knew that, even before his feet carried him forward and his arms reached for the prow of the canoe, too heavy to move by himself. Tama saw him try, and the young ape leaped forward, only, too happy to help in any way he could. The boat slithered and slipped into the river, while Lane's feet lifted over the side and he settled in it, his face pointing down the river, his hands reaching unconsciously for the paddle. Tama started to clamber in, but he shook his head quickly. "No, Tama."

"Why, teacher?"

"Because I'm going away, Tama, and you can't go where I must. Tell Ajub the books can serve him better than I could and that I've gone back to my people! Good-by, Tama."

"Teacher! Don't go! Come back!" It was an anguished wail, as the ape-child leaped up and down on the bank, but the boat was sliding away, already out of reach. Lane sighed softly, glancing back and waving at the bend in the stream, before he lost sight of the familiar landmarks. But from behind him still, he heard the wail of the ape. "Teacher, come back! Don't go away, teacher! Come back!"

The sound seemed to haunt Lane during the short time that day was still with him; then it vanished into the jungle night, muffled by the calls of the great cats and the constant murmur of the stream. His shoulders ached deadily, moving the paddle steadily, driving the canoe onward. His stomach was empty, but it never reached a conscious level. He hunched forward as he stroked, unaware of fatigue or hunger, not knowing at the moment that there was anything except the tumult of emotions inside him.

Somewhere, the river had to flow into a lake or the sea, and before that there'd be white men. Africa was by no means entirely explored, but the whites were everywhere, save for such scattered little places, unimportant and uninviting, as the tribe had chosen. The whites might be only a hundred

miles away or a thousand, but the stream flowed toward them, carrying him onward at perhaps seventy miles a day, in addition to the impulse of his paddling.

He stopped once to approach the shore and locate a clearer section, where a tiny stream joined the larger one. There he leaned over and quenched his thirst, grasping the low limb of a tree to steady the canoe. Twice, fruit overhung the water and he gathered in handfuls of it, storing it in front of him, then going on; begrudging the time taken in eating it.

He was still paddling onward when the sun rose again, quieting the cries of the carnivores, and filling the air with life. He ate hastily of the fruit, drank again from water that was none too clean, barely avoiding the form of a snake that had crawled out on a branch, and picked up the paddle to go on. A crocodile opened its jaws and snapped within inches of his paddle, but he hardly saw it.

Fatigue could not be avoided or ignored forever, though, and he was finally forced to pull in his paddle to keep from dropping it overboard out of numb fingers. He slipped down into the boat, letting the sleep roll over him, waking only fitfully when the boat drifted into the quiet shallows along the sides, sending it out again into the main stream, and going back to his crazy dreams. Even in sleep, the onward drive possessed him completely.

Another night came, and his paddle rose and fell monotonously until it gave place to day, and the heat and fatigue forced him to stop again. And a third night was going when the little river opened onto a larger stream, with a swarm of native huts stinking up the air near the joining point. Some of the blacks saw him and yelled, but there was no sign of whites near them, and he lifted the paddle once, then dug it into the water and drifted beyond the smell of the village. At least he was reaching populated country, and white men must be near, somewhere.

That day, he paddled on, unmindful of fatigue, noting other villages along the way. Once a canoe shoved out from shore, but turned back after a short chase, whether friendly or otherwise. The chief had been wearing a high hat, and there was no longer any doubt as to the nearness of his own people! Sluggishly, hour after hour he sat there paddling, not even stopping to drink the dirty water; his supply of fruit was exhausted, and there was none at hand, but

he shrugged the hunger aside. Always, one more hour might bring him to a settlement.

The stink of another village had come and gone when he heard the splashing of many paddles behind him; looking back, he saw the river filled with three boats, each carrying about a score of the blacks, yelling something in a native language full of labials as they saw him turn. Whatever it was, it sounded far from friendly, and he spurred his efforts, trying to leave them behind. Even in semicivilized parts of Africa, a lone white man might be more valued for his possible possessions than for the civilization his race brings unasked.

The paddles behind drew nearer, and he knew he had no chance against their well-manned boats, but there was still some hope that he might get beyond the distance they were willing to pursue. Then a short spear with a long notched iron point slipped by within inches of his shoulder. Apparently they waited after that to see whether he would pick up a gun and return their fire, but took heart as he made no sign of doing so. Other spears began coming toward him, one striking the rear of the canoe and shivering there, half-spinning him about in the river.

He gritted his teeth, hunching low and throwing his weary shoulder muscles into the paddling, wondering whether cannibalism had entirely died out. If only a white would appear somewhere, or some other village into which he could turn on the chance that they might be friendly! The river remained bare ahead.

They had ceased throwing spears, probably waiting to get closer for a better chance, and he stole a brief glance backward, to see a man standing in the front of each canoe, his spear raised. As Lane looked, the leading one drew his arm back with a quick jerk.

It missed by scant inches as he dropped into the canoe, the paddle slipping from his blistered hands! Then, a roar seemed to split the air from the side, and there came the sound of a savage thump from behind him, followed by a splashing of the water and the confused, frightened shouts of the blacks. He raised his head to see something come flashing toward a second boat, ripping it open below the water line, just as the third spear slid across his forehead in a savage lance of pain!

Then he was dropping back again, feeling consciousness run out of him in slow lingering waves, while warm blood poured

down his face and mixed with the filth at the bottom of the canoe. Either the boats behind had ceased paddling, or his ears no longer heard them. Vaguely he wondered what had caused the havoc he'd glimpsed, but the thought was fading as it entered his mind, and the blackness won over it. The canoe drifted on, bumping into shallows, twisting about, sometimes hitting mid-stream and rushing along. Flies hovered over it, but they no longer could bother him. Only the shallow rise and fall of his breast attested to life. The next day found him still drifting, but now the red flush of fever was spread across his face, and he moaned and twisted, reaching futile hands toward the water around him, only to drop back weakly.

There must have been moments of semi-consciousness. Dimly he was aware of shouting and jarring, of being lifted out of the canoe and being carried somewhere by gentle hands. And there was the sound of speech around him at times, something soft under him into which he sank, and some dim feminine face. But such things were all clouded with dream-phantoms and the sound of his own voice rambling on and on. A vague sense of passing time struck him, and he was somehow aware of days going by slowly.

At least his surroundings came as no surprise to Lane on the tenth day, when the fever vanished suddenly, leaving him weak and sickened, but lucid and free of its grip. Above him, the face of a middle-aged woman—a white woman—drifted around a room filled with the marks of civilization. She was dressed in light clothes, and there was a faint rustle of cloth as she moved, a fainter odor of some inexpensive perfume, now only a ghost left from the last time she'd used it. Weakness hit harder at him, and he fought to hold his eyes open as she brought a bowl of some broth and began feeding it to him carefully. Seeing that his eyes were open and intelligent again, she smiled, propping his head further up on the pillows, brushing the hair back over his forehead, where only a trace of pain marked the cut made by the spear.

"Where—"

"*Shush!* You're among friends here, Mr. Lane. We found your canoe by luck and we've been taking care of you; you'll be all right in another week—just the fever and the loss of blood. One more swallow—that's it. You mustn't talk now, though; just re-

lax and go back to sleep. Everything's going to be all right."

The words, the feminine voice, the smile all lingered in his mind after she closed the door; he lay quietly on the bed, savoring the feeling of being among his own kind. But the sleep would not come, though he closed his eyes and tried to obey her; he heard the door open once, to close quickly, and her voice whispering beyond it in answer to a faint question. "He's asleep, Sam. Poor devil!"

People; his people! Men and women who talked too much about things that were of no consequence, laughed when there was no reason, cried when they felt no pain—weak, puny, silly creatures like himself, climbing slowly and erratically upward to the sound of their idle chatter!

It was too much to put into words as he lay there, watching the moon stream in through a screen window and wash over the bedding, across the room and onto some picture hanging on the wall. He sank deeper in the bedding, letting the idea seep in slowly, and the men's voices outside were only a background to it at first, until his own name caught his attention.

It was a rough, good-natured voice, probably the man to whom the woman had spoken before. "Imagine Lane out in that over eight years, Harper; it's a miracle he got back at all, without going insane for good. Wonder how he'll find life now, though?"

"Meaning?" The second voice was younger, sure of itself, arrogant in a cultured sort of way that indicated mostly a carelessness at ordinary weaknesses.

"Meaning things have changed for the man; you know—he's been declared legally dead, of course. He used to be quite a character from the newspaper accounts I read when I was visiting my sister in America. But by this time, most of his fortune's been split up and spent, and I don't know whether he can get hold of enough to live on now. Certainly not the way he used to. Then there's the war going on and all. It'll be a funny world to him, with most of his friends changed and grown away from him."

"Yeah, I suppose so. But it can't be any stranger than what he's been through, Livy."

"H-m-m." The tone was doubtful, but they were quiet then, a faint odor of tobacco drifting in through the netting over the windows. Harvey Lane lay still, turning it over in his mind and listening for more words that did not come.

He hadn't thought of all that, of course, but he should have. When he didn't come back, the vultures would have lost no time in swooping in to claim his money; and knowing them, he could believe Sam Livy's doubt as to how much would be left. What the taxes and lawyers had left would be gone long before this. Still, he wondered how much that mattered to him.

The ring on his finger still would secure passage back with a few hundred dollars to spare. After that, he'd worry about it as it came, even though he possessed no skills with which to earn his living; life among the apes had stripped him of the false standards of living, had hardened him and left him with no fear of work, and had taught him the appreciation of simplicity. He'd make out; how didn't matter, as long as he was among his own kind again.

Harper's brisk voice picked up the conversation outside. "Guess I'll be pulling out tomorrow, Livy. The boys are all ready, and the group I'm leading is sort of anxious to get started. Hope it's not entirely a fool trip."

"I wouldn't bet on it; the man's been through hell, and it may all be delirious ravings, like that nonsense about the gorilla tribe speaking the purest English!"

"I'll take a chance on it. At worst, it's new country and there should be plenty of game there. Anyhow, there was that Frenchman who spent a couple of years among a bunch of gorillas without being hurt—that seems to be on the level. Maybe Lane did live among 'em for a while, probably getting them and a tribe of blacks who rescued him later all mixed up, with some other things thrown in. I'm betting he did, since some of the things he kept muttering make it pretty plain he knows a good bit about the habits of the apes!"

There was the sound of a match striking, then Harper's voice went on again. "Besides, it isn't such a long trek, and all we have to do is follow the river, the way he indicated. If there are no gorillas, we'll have a nice trip, and the would-be big game hunters with me will get their fill; if the gorillas are there, I'll get me a couple of nice pelts for mounting, and with luck maybe capture a couple of young ones. They'll fetch a sweet price if the hair's as light a red as Lane was raving about."

"Well, I wish you luck, but—"

"No luck needed, Livy. With the equipment we've got, a dozen tribes of gorillas as smart as he made out wouldn't worry us,

and I'll get mine, one way or another. I figure we can leave here—"

But Lane wasn't listening then. He was seeing old Ajub mounted in a museum, his gray-speckled red pelt stuffed, with a placard under it; and he was thinking of little Tama crying in a cage somewhere, while fools debated whether an ape could be intelligent; or little Tama being examined by scientists to determine his ability to think, while searching parties went out to bring in more of these curious anthropoids. Oh, they'd fetch a wonderful price, all right!

Perhaps it was logical that man should brook no rivals to his supremacy. But in any event, the outcome was certain. Even the primitives of his own race had fared badly enough, and the apes, no matter how intelligent, would remain only curious beasts, unprotected by any man-law, and sought for by every showman and theorist in the world.

Very slowly, without noise, he slid out from under the bedding, forcing himself to his feet in spite of the weakness that ran over him. For a moment it seemed that he might faint, but that passed; while his knees shook under him and the room seemed to spin around him, he conquered himself enough to stand alone and to move toward the closet the moonlight revealed. Inside there were clothes which did not belong to him but which fitted him well enough, and he drew them on, supporting himself against a wall.

The silhouettes of the two men on the porch were undisturbed as he glanced about, and he scanned the room hurriedly for a rifle or automatic, but saw none; he dared not venture into other rooms. There were few things that would be of value to him, save a basket of fruit and homemade candies, but he stuffed his pockets with them, forcing down the too-sweet stuff to provide the energy he needed. Finished, he ripped aside the netting over the back window, being careful to muffle the sound, and let himself drop shakily to the ground below, hanging onto the window frame and forcing himself to cling to his consciousness.

He rejected the use of a canoe, knowing that he could never paddle even a light one up the river. Beyond, in the stables, a horse whinnied softly, and he debated chancing that, but gave the idea up; he would be too easily seen leading one away, and he was in no condition for a wild chase. Besides, the horses might give the alarm if a stranger

approached them, and his only chance lay in stealth.

Picking the deeper shadows, he crept out away from the house and toward the gate of the compound, now guarded by a sleeping blackboy. The snores continued undisturbed as he let himself out, and the great continent lay before him. To one side, he saw the river and headed for it, knowing that he must stay beside it and follow it back the way he had come.

It was an utterly stupid business, without the faintest hope of success, and his rational mind knew that. Even if he could stand the long trip, and avoid all carnivores and hostile blacks without losing his way, it was an almost impossible task, with no equipment or food. Besides, Harper and his crowd would be pushing on rapidly, probably doubling the distance he could cover in a day. And there was always the possibility that they would decide to trail him, believing he had wandered off in a fit of delirium; on horseback, they could catch up with him in short order.

He forged ahead as rapidly as he could, leaving the last signs of the white quarters behind and picking his way along the rough trail that ran beside the river, limiting his stops for rest to the briefest time he could. Here the moon shone fitfully, brilliant at times and hidden by trees at others. He had no way of knowing what dangers were lurking around him in the jungle that began beside the trail, and he disregarded them; if he had to die, then he would, but at least he could make the attempt.

Then, off to the side and behind he heard something moving through the strip of jungle; the sound was of one animal, and a large one, moving with some stealth, but not overly worried about noise. For a moment, he considered climbing upward out of reach of whatever it was, but it was nearly day and probably only a lion making its way home after a night's feeding. The fact that he could hear it with his comparatively untrained ears was encouraging, for he knew the cats could move silently when they chose. He got to his feet, chewing on more of the candy, and continued onward grimly.

The sound came again, this time slightly nearer; maybe that lion, if such it was, was going home hungry instead of after feeding. Sometimes when bad luck had bothered them, they were quite willing to vary their diet with a little human meat, though this seemed rather close to the guns

of the whites for a man-eater. He was staring back down the trail, trying to see his pursuer, when his name was called.

"Lane! Harvey Lane!" It came now from the side, muffled from its passage through the jungle growth, the sound of the creature he had heard before accompanying it. He jerked around, setting his eyes frantically to darting about, but seeing nothing. So they'd found him, already, and were probably surrounding him carefully on the theory that he was mad! He slipped to the side of the trail, hoping to find a place where he could hide, and knowing he'd have no chances, when the voice came again, this time clearer. "Teacher!"

"Ajub!" And even as he spoke, the great ape stepped quietly onto the trail in front of him, the huge spear poised easily, and several others carried in a sling.

"Hello, Lane! I thought those were your tracks leading away from the place back there when I smelled them, though I couldn't be sure with all the various human scents around. You have no business unarmed out here!"

Lane sank down on the ground, relief and fresh fear coursing through him at the thousand ideas the ape's presence brought to his mind. "Ajub, those people—the other whites—they're organizing a hunting expedition against your kind. I babbled in my fever, and they're probably already started."

The heavy-featured face betrayed no emotion. "I know. I found a way to get close to their huts, and I've been listening to the plans. It doesn't matter."

"But they're well equipped this time; you can't eliminate them all!"

"Naturally. But they won't find our village; another bull came with me, and I've sent him back with the word. He'll have us moved out to another place we found long ago, and an even better hiding place. When your friends reach the old one, there'll be only a piece of burned-over ground, with no trail behind to betray us."

The load that lifted from Lane's shoulders then was almost physical, and he climbed to his feet again, with the help of one of Ajub's muscular arms. "Why'd you follow me, Ajub? You had the books, and they hold more knowledge in better form than I can give you. You had no need of recapturing me!"

"Nor intention; you were free to leave us any time you wished, Lane—I thought you always knew that." Ajub shook his heavy head, rattling the big spears on his back. "Physically, you're only a child to us, you know, and you needed protection; we were merely serving as your bodyguard down the banks of the river. If we hadn't, those blacks in their canoes would have captured you, too. And after you were found, sick and raving about us, I naturally stayed."

Lane should have known that only Ajub's people could have broken up the canoes at their distance from the shore, without the sound of guns; but he'd had no time to think of the incident since. He felt the tender scar tissue on his forehead, grimacing, and shrugged. "You might as well have let them succeed—then I couldn't have betrayed you to the whites! Well, get it over with!"

"What?"

"Your vengeance. It's what you stayed for, isn't it? I guess I'd do the same, so you don't need to pass judgment before the execution."

For a minute, Ajub stared at him stupidly, an almost human grin of amusement creeping over his face. "No, Harvey Lane; I stayed to give you directions for finding us if you ever wanted to, again. Here, I've drawn a map of the new route as best I can. Now let me carry you home to your friends before I go back to mine."

He picked Lane up as he might have handled a child, slinging him easily across one huge shoulder and trotting down the trail, his other hand touching the ground as he ran. And slowly the man relaxed, mentally as well as physically, for the first time in days.

"Ajub," he said quietly into the ape's ear, "you've got your directions twisted. According to this map you've drawn, my friends are north of here—a long ways north."

He heard the chief's sudden chuckle, felt the strong old body swing around and head the other way in the same effortless stride that ate up the miles without haste, and then he was sleeping peacefully, his head half-buried in the grayish-red fur beneath him. Ajub smiled widely and moved gently, but the distance shortened between them and home.

Gleeps

By P. Schuyler Miller

Gleeps was—Lord only knows what. He or it was curious, though—and utterly unpredictable, and it turned up anywhere as anybody or anything in the star lanes. Sometimes, more or less accidentally, Gleeps could be helpful—

It seems there were two Martians, Xnpqrdt and Tdrqpnx. Or maybe it was two Venusians—or even two Irishmen. You know how the thing goes as well as I do.

So these two Martians meet on a street somewhere—let's say it was on Main Street in Plnth—and Tdrqpnx says to Xnpqrdt: "Who was that zzyzytk I seen you with last night?"

And Xnpqrdt—if it was Xnpqrdt—turns bright pea-green and answers: "That was no zzyzytk—that was Gleeps."

O.K.—I know it's old with whiskers. I know your great-grandfather heard it in a bar on Io the year before the red comet. Probably *his* great-grandfather heard it some other place the year before something else. The fact remains that there are plenty of people who never even-heard of Gleeps. As a matter of fact, what do *you* know about him?

Oh, sure—he's common knowledge. Everyone knows Gleeps. He's been in everybody's hair, and there usually wasn't any hair left when he got through. And yet you can travel as far as any warpship will take you in this universe and the next—you can shinny up and down Time like a monkey on a stick, or you can riffle through dimensions like a mail-order catalogue, and you still won't find anyone, man, beast or tensor, who has ever seen him, who has any idea where he comes from, or when, or why. Sure—there are guesses. Anyone can guess. There's been books written about him in places like Mars where they've known about him for a thousand years. Chances are there's been wars fought over him. But Gleeps himself is just—nothing. A name. Bad luck with a personality.

Like anyone else who's ever had to do with him, I have a kind of picture of him in my own mind. I know it's wacky. I know there isn't a jit of truth in it: there can't be. But it's the way Gleeps seems to me.

The way I see him he's a little guy—maybe forty, maybe forty-five—getting a little thin on top, so his scalp shows through. He has a round, wrinkled-up, pinkish kind of face like a worried baby's, with wide blue eyes and a button of a nose. He wears big glasses—the old kind, with earpieces. He don't much more than come up to my shoulder, and I'm not so big. His clothes are always neat and his shoes polished. And he's always grinning—apologetic, sort of. He don't *like* to make trouble for anyone. He's so damn curious about things!

You look at him, you can tell his whole make-up is one big question mark: the way his eyebrows arch up over his eyes like a pair of hoop bridges—the way his mouth is always a little bit open, ready to ask a question if he wasn't so polite about butting in—the way he's always tensed up on tiptoe, eager about what goes on. Only I guess he don't look anything like that. It's just the way he is in my own mind. I can remember the description a broken-down old cephalopod gave me of him once, but on the Tauroids gave some place! It would make you spit green—but it was the same guy. Gleeps.

The way I see it, Gleeps is an investigator. I like that better written with a capital: Investigator. It's almost like he wore a badge—I bet I could go on and describe that, too, like I have him, but it would be all jet-wash. Nobody's ever seen him. Nobody *can* see him, unless maybe it's another of his own kind—if there is another.

Like I said, I figure Gleeps is an Investigator. As far back as you want to go, he always has been, and as far ahead as you want to go in a bender, he always will be. Everywhere you go in this or any other universe he is, was and will be. He's everywhere and everywhere—but I said that before.

I can't make up my mind whether he

works for somebody or if he's on his own. I kind of think he's on his own—it fits in better with the picture I have of him—and yet I can't see anyone going to all the trouble he does just to be nosy. The real trouble is, I can't imagine what kind of Who it would be that Gleeps could be working for. It's bad enough trying to figure out Gleeps himself!

The way I see it, Gleeps is like the elephant's child in the old story I heard somewhere, from some old guy, when I was a kid back on Earth. Elephants were gone then, and had been long before my time or my grandfather's, but they had some stuffed in museums and pictures in books and like that. I know what an elephant is, which is a lot more than you can say for some other lunks who are horsing around space with an astrogator's card and nothing between the ears but star-sweepings. Anyway, this elephant's child in the story went around asking questions of everybody and about everything until he got his nose pulled out from a button into a regular hawser. He had an insatiable curiosity, the story said. I kind of figure Gleeps is an Insatiable Curiosity.

Let me tell you about it.

The way I remember—and it was a long time ago—I was working out of Aldebaran 12 as astrogator on a second-rate bargain-liner with warpers so old their Heisenberg made anything I did pretty much of a joke. You can line a ship up to run according to the way the warp field is laid, and if your uncertainty factor isn't bigger than your variables you can come out pretty close to where you were aiming, but on an old crock like the *Solarian Queen* I might just as well have been figuring odds on a *glinth* race as trying to lay the course. My real job was to figure out where we were when we got there.

The astrogator they'd had came down with appendicitis or the itch or something just before they made port. Maybe he just couldn't take what those breakdown warpers did to all his pretty figures. Anyway, they needed a new man and I was around, so they hired me. I've learned to take things the way they come and not bat my brains out worrying about how they ought to be. If I hadn't, that cruise would have added my noggin like shirred eggs and no mistake!

I like to know about the people on ships. I'm 'gating. It don't make with the figures any, of course, but it gives you something

to play with in your head between times. So I upended a handy packing case near the foot of the gangway after I'd signed on and stowed my gear, and settled down to look them over as they came aboard.

Most of the crew had been on ground leave. I'd looked over the skeleton shift they had standing by under the second officer and didn't think much of any of them, one way or the other. The second, Davy, was an old guy—older than me by a lot—and the chances were he couldn't get papers for anything bigger than the *Queen*. He was a sniffer: I could tell by the waxy look to his skin, and the traces of red dust in his sandy, gnawed-looking mustache. Myself, if I was on the way out and had better days to remember and no future to speak of, I'd like to keep myself in a mild *snit-haze* just to be able to stand what I was doing.

The old man was different. He laid a fishy eye on me when he came aboard, but that was all. I figured I'd get mine later, when I handed him my specifications. The port officials would lay out the rising course for him, and he wouldn't want anything from me until we were in space and ready to go on the warpers.

This Captain Humphreys was a big, sleek-looking man with polish on his fingernails. That don't mean what it used to when I was making my first plot, back before there were warpers. All it told me was that the old man was smelling around in big-money circles where that kind of thing was the same as a clean shirt to me. Take him out of his uniform and he could be a banker. Matter of fact, that uniform was a lot newer and cleaner than anything had a right to be on a scow of the age and the general decrepitude of the old *Queen*.

One by one they came straggling along. Some of 'em knew me, some of 'em stopped to pass the time of day just in case I was somebody with an in, and the rest slogged by like they were pallbearers at their own wedding. I began to figure a little about what it was going to be like aboard the *Queen*.

The passengers came aboard all together with the first officer. There were eight of 'em—which is all a leaky bathtub like the *Solarian Queen* can handle—and they gave me something more to figure on. Leastways, three of 'em did—three and the first.

There was nothing unusual about the other five. They were just about what you'd expect on a cut-rate cruise: two old-maid

schoolteachers who'd given up their last hope of ever getting themselves a man, but were still going through the motions—one he old-maid ditto—and a couple on their second honeymoon. One of the teachers—the one with the wig—was Miss Sammons, and her girl friend was Miss Abernathy. The professor had a name to go with his nose glasses and high collar: Florenzo. The old couple were the Bascoms—they were just taking things as they came and having a grand time. I made up my mind I'd stop around sometime and spin a yarn or two I figured they might like to hear.

Two of the other three were women, and they weren't schoolteachers. I wasn't ready right then to say what they might be. Thing that was dead certain was that they didn't belong on the *Queen* any more than the captain did—or the first.

The one was blond; the other was a brunette. The blonde was quite a bit older—I wouldn't want to say how much older, even with the experience I've had, because you can't tell about blondes in the first place and because there'd been a lot of money spent by someone on her face and figure. I will admit they got their money's worth, whoever they were.

The brunette was a lot younger, although with the stuff she had covering up her face you had to look twice to know it. I didn't mind looking. She had a kind of small nose and big eyes and the look to her that means she was born with money in her veins instead of blood. Looked to me like she'd had a transfusion sometime, though, because it wasn't money that was steaming over the first.

He didn't fit the set-up any better than the two mantraps. He wasn't much older than the young one. He was big and red-headed, and had a spaceburn thick enough so's it could have been laid on with a calker's knife. Whichever way you figured him it came out wrong. Any man who didn't rate a better berth than the *Queen*, at his age was too dumb to have a first's papers. Likewise, any cub fresh out of training school, the way he pretty surely was, would be placed in one of the big lines. It didn't figure.

Out of the three, he was the only one who laid an eye on me. It was a hard blue eye, and I told myself then that whatever reason he had for shipping on this crate was good.

It started aboard after them when I saw the crawling cadaver who was hobbling up

the plank. When a Martian gets old you know it. His hide wrinkles up like the flesh had been drained out from in under and begins to fray at the folds. His nice spinach-green complexion turns sort of moldy and the bags under his eyes slop down until you could sling cargo with 'em. He gets sand in his joints and walks like an arthritic crab. And old Foozy was as old as they get.

What's it matter what his real name was? I can't spell it and you couldn't pronounce it. When he was chief cook for the Planets line we called him Foozy for some reason or other and it stuck. Even then he was the damndest, mangiest, scrawniest string of dried-up rock tripe you could want to see. But he could cook! Martians are born with a skillet in their fist, and old Foozy was king of 'em all. Planets was a luxury line, and it had passangers who came aboard to eat Foozy's cooking and didn't leave the table until the liner docked again back on Earth.

We saw each other at the same time. His ugly face split wide open and he began to cackle like a hen that's laid an ostrich egg. I hit him a clip on the back that nearly stove in his scrawny old ribs and grabbed him by the hand. Right then I knew he was riding high, because he was wearing *zint*-skin gloves. *Zints* have been extinct on Mars for twenty-thirty thousand years, and there likely aren't more than a dozen pairs of *zint*-gloves in space. They came out of kings' tombs and such. And Foozy was wearing one of the dozen.

So I was astrogator of the *Queen*. So I was supposed to get out my tables and my calculator and give the old man a sheet of figures to fiddle with when he managed to get us off the ground. Sure that's what I was hired for. But it was all of fifteen years since I'd laid eyes on Foozy or he on me. Maybe sixteen. So we went down to his coop and split a bottle for old times.

Me, I never heard the buzzer when we blasted off. Neither did he, far's I know. We were singing about that time. All of a sudden I was on my back under the bunk, with Foozy and a mess of bottles piled on me, and five-six G's jamming rivers into my epidermis. When it tapered off so I could stand up and sling Foozy into the bunk, it was time for me to have my figures ready. Only I didn't.

I had a pretty good story ready by the time I got to the control robm. I disremember now what it was. Anyway, with

the help of what had been in Foozy's bottle, I'd worked things around so I was pretty sore about the way they were treating me. I was all set to give the old man hell and no mistake. I'd stood for all I was going to from him, which was pretty good seeing I hadn't reported to him yet. I slapped open the door to the control room, tripped over the sill and went flat on my face at his feet.

Like I said, Captain Humphreys was a big man. He used just one hand in my collar to pick me up. The two wenches were standing there taking the whole thing in, and it riled my dignity a mite to be dangling there in his fist like a bunch of carrots or such. Then he set me down, so hard it jarred my back teeth loose. For the time being I couldn't get started on any of the things I had figured out. Nor I didn't get the chance.

Humphreys had a voice like a banker—soft and slippery like a swipe in the face with wet rawhide. I was glad there were ladies present so's he wouldn't feel free to let himself go.

"You crawling, drunken old sumprat," he started in, "if you come into my control room in that condition again I'll take your *spodlak*-soaked liver out by the roots and fry it in your greasy brains! What do you mean by handing me a sheet like that? What am I supposed to do with it? Read it, you molting worm!"

He shoved a fistful of paper under my nose. I eased back enough so's I could focus on it. It looked familiar, kind of. Then it dawned on me that it was in my own handwriting.

On a tub like the *Solarian Queen* you can put all the figures you've got any need for on one sheet. You give the captain a couple or three reasonable sounding settings, he feeds 'em into the integrator, and you go into a warp. After a while you come out again. If you're extra lucky, you're in the right system. So you figure where you are and try again.

Any equation that gets beyond the third order don't make sense in a junk shop like that. You can figure 'em, but the warpers can't handle 'em. This thing he was shoving at me ran to seven orders and five pages. There were terms in it I'd never heard of. I got my teeth settled in my mouth and told him so. That was a mistake.

"Why, you wriggling nematode," he told me, "you walked in here three minutes ago and handed me this thing. Then you drizzled out under the door like the bilge wash you

are without so much as a salute."

"He didn't use the door, Captain Humphreys." It was the little brunette being bright and shining. She was looking at me like I was something in a zoo or a museum. "He disappeared."

Well, the captain looked at her, and she stared at me, and I stared at all of 'em. I didn't like what I saw in the blonde's eyes. It was a lot more respect than I want any blonde to have for me. I began to wonder about things.

"What do you mean, Miss Beaulieu?" the old man demanded.

Her jaw set. She was younger than I'd thought, and she didn't like being contradicted. "What I said!" she snapped. "He disappeared. Like that!" She snapped her fingers in midair.

I gave her a sour look. When I feel the way I did then, other people disappear; I don't. I said so. She didn't take it well.

"Don't be impertinent," she told me. "I saw you. Miss Mason saw you. We all saw you. Didn't we?"

I looked at the blonde again. If she was Karen Mason, little boys were told about her when they went to college. It never did any good. I could see why.

"I'm sure I can't say what you saw, Anastasia dear," she drawled. It was good and nasty. "You know best what it seemed to be."

Anastasia clammed up then and there, and high time it was, too. She wasn't letting any blonde make her out a two-seer. Also, the whole thing was going over the captain's head, and he didn't like that at all. He glowered at me and I beat him to the shout. I opened my eyes as wide as I could and made the figures stand still on the paper for a moment. They looked sort of odd, but reasonable. I shoved the thing back at him.

"What's the matter?" I asked him. "Can't you read it? I laid it out for you—now you run it."

I turned around on one heel and reached for the doorknob. It was a couple of inches too far away and I kept right on going around. I spun twice on my left heel, like a top, and sat down hard on the floor.

Anastasia Beaulieu guffawed. "Disappear again," she urged brutally. "I liked it."

Then, for the first time on that nightmare junket, I was saved by the gong. I was wondering whether the captain was going to kick my ribs in while I was down, or knock me down again after I got up, when the door opened and Foozy wandered in.

I never saw a Martian sober so fast. The way he was when I left him I thought he'd be out cold until we docked. Ordinarily, alcohol pickles Martians the way it would a beet. Does something to their chlorophyll. Foozy looked as fresh as a stick of celery. He was walking sprier and straighter than when he came aboard. The captain took one look at him and smiled all over his face. The two dames wriggled their shapes straight and began to gather round. All for one desiccated ex-space cook old enough to remember Mrs. Roosevelt!

"What isss it, Captain Humfreeesss?" he asked in that steam-whistle voice of his. "What isss happening to my ffffriend, Missster Jonessss?"

"Mr. Jones slipped." The captain lied with as straight and smug a face as I've ever seen. Meanwhile I was climbing hand over hand up the leg of the table. "We were discussing his calculations for our course."

Foozy looked at me. There was a funny expression in his eyes, like he had never seen me before. "What isss wrong with the galgulationsss, my ffffriend Missster Jonessss?" he inquired politely.

I was on my feet again, and my honor as an astrogator was bruised. I gave them all a glare and draped my arm around Foozy's bony neck. "Nothing's wrong with 'em!" I told him. "Captain can't read 'em, is it my worry? For you I'll set 'em up myself!"

My head was going around like a gyrowheel, but I got to the integrator all right, snatching the paper out of the captain's hand as I went past. It still looked queer, but I punched the field equations and reached for the switch. Immediately the expanse of stars outside our port blanked out and there was that screwing, stretching feeling that means the ship is being poked through a hole in nowhere to come out a couple thousand light years away on the other side.

I don't know now whether I saw what I saw, but I think so. They were all looking at me, and I was looking at Foozy. And he disappeared. Where he had been standing was one of those cockeyed little birds like a ruffled-up pine cone with a Roman nose and pipe-cleaner legs, staring at me out of one beady eye.

So I passed out.

I had me a dream. They were all playing a game, running around and around in a circle with me in the middle, getting dizzier with every round. Anastasia was chasing the first officer and the first was after the

blonde. The blonde was chasing the captain. I couldn't see who he was chasing, but Foozy and that cockeyed little bird were hopping back and forth on the side lines cackling some crazy tune. I couldn't stand it, so I woke up.

Someone was shaking me. It was the blonde, Karen Mason. She wasn't wearing anything to speak of, and I wouldn't be one to talk under those circumstances. I tried to give her a friendly welcome, but she sidestepped it. Then I saw that she had a gun in her hand.

"How'd you do it, Jonesy?" she asked.

I hadn't done anything I could remember. "Do what?" I asked her, just to keep the ball rolling.

She smiled. It wasn't the kind of smile she'd been giving the first and the captain. It made my scalp crawl.

"You know what," she said, oh very sweetly, but with icicles. "You and that Martian. Only he's boiled too hard to tell me. You disappeared, and you're going to tell little Karen how you did it."

I remembered the nasty little glint I'd seen in her eye when Anastasia was talking all that guff about disappearing. It didn't help any to know that she had seen me disappear, too. I began to wonder where a guy like me went when he disappeared.

For the second time the gong rang with me hanging on the ropes. This time it went off like the howl of a skinned wolf. It went on and on like a siren with the hiccups. People began yelling and doors slammed and feet began pounding up and down the alley. I pushed the blonde in the middle—hard—and snatched open the door.

It was Davy, the second officer. He came bouncing down the alley like the ball in a game of comet pool. Tears were streaming down his face and both hands were clapped over his nose. He shot out into the passenger lounge, nearly knocking over the skinniest of the schoolteachers, dived into the carpet and began rooting up the pattern like a Membraso boar.

There was a head in every doorway. Most of 'em were watching Davy, but Anastasia was looking at me—and past me at the undressed blonde. Sparks spit out of her black eyes and she slammed her door. It didn't slam very hard so she opened it and slammed it again.

The old maids—all three of 'em—were trying to separate Davy from the carpet. Foozy wasn't visible; I remembered the blonde said he was still stiff. But what ailed

the second had happened in his cell, so I went there with the Mason right after me.

Prentiss, the first officer, was ahead of us. I looked under his arm into the cabin. I told you Davy was a sniffer. There was *snitt* all over the place. It was strewn over the top of the table and floating in the air like red smoke. The color didn't look right to me. I dabbed some up on my finger and stuck it in my mouth.

It was like licking fire. I let out one howl that beat Davy's best. I opened my mouth and stuck out my tongue and tried to fan it with both hands. Then over the end of my nose I saw something that propped my jaw wide open and left it sagging.

The *snitt* was gathering itself together in a neat little pile in the middle of Davy's table, like a flicker strip running backward. Down the corridor the second stopped yelping, and I suddenly discovered the fire had gone out of my tongue. Then the stuff wasn't there. There was a book instead—a small red book. Prentiss picked it up and opened it. The pages were blank. He closed it and his square jaw drooped.

"Space almighty!" he whispered. "*Gleeps!*"

To me that was double-talk. Likewise to the blonde. She pushed past me and took the book out of his hand. She still wasn't wearing enough and it worried me where she could have put the gun. She riffled through the pages. There was printing on them now!

I saw the first slowly turning red under the tan. He flung a look at me hard enough to split a jet lining. "Go get your Martian pal," he snarled. "I want to have a talk with him."

"Why don't you talk to Miss Mason?" It was the little brunette, Anastasia Beaulieu, and she was being so sweet it hurt. "I'm sure she will be much more entertaining."

He stared at her. She was using the doorway for a frame, and she was wearing just a little more than the Mason dame. I wondered if maybe they were trying to outstrip each other. I sort of wanted to be around for the finale.

The first began to suck air like a drowning fish. His face was pretty near the color of his hair and his neck was even redder. Then he clamped his jaw down hard and strode at her with fire in his eye. She moved. He slammed up the alley into the control room.

I know when I'm not wanted. I went out

into the lounge and began to spin yarns with the old people, and pretty soon I had a quiet and appreciative audience except for Professor Florenzo, who sat over in the corner making clinking noises as though his teeth were loose or he didn't believe me. The Mason ginch ducked into her cabin with the book under one arm, and came out a few minutes later with more clothes on and no book. She headed up the alley toward the control room.

A little later I noticed the bird was there again, standing spraddle-legged on the carpet, looking up at us with its head on one side, like an old man with his hands behind his back. First it would look at me, and then it would use the other eye to ogle Anastasia. She hadn't bothered to change. She was hunched up in the corner opposite the professor with her feet tucked under her, glowering. One of the old maids went over and tried to make conversation, but it didn't make. She wanted to glower.

We were still in the warp. I didn't know how long I'd been off the log, and I couldn't remember any of the figures I was supposed to have set up, but it seemed to me that we'd been in a long time. I figured that might be what was wrong with Anastasia's temper. Some people get peevish in a warp.

I was wondering about Foozy, too. If the first wanted him, it might be smart to wake him up and chew some fat first. I gave my public the brush-off and started for his coop just as Mason and the first came ambling down the alley, arm in arm.

The first looked across the lounge at Anastasia, and she looked back at him. He looked miserable and she looked murder. Then the blonde tugged him gently toward the door of her cabin and the two of them slid inside. And Anastasia began to bawl.

Foozle could wait. I grabbed the nearest bottle and applied first aid.

She was mad enough to talk, but she didn't have anything to say. If I'd been around Earth more, I'd have known right off that Anastasia Beaulieu was the latest glamour queen of the System. What she didn't have, on hand or on call, no one had a right to. She was making time with our first, young Prentiss, when he suddenly threw up a good job and signed on the *Queen*. When she found that Karen Mason was on the passenger list, she bought a ticket herself.

That was all there was to it. Girl meets boy. Girl chases boy. Girl/don't get boy. Girl gets mad. It didn't contribute anything

to the screwy stuff that was going on, so I started for Foozy's door again. This time the gong caught me with my back turned.

Did I say gong? It sounded like a geyser with stomach ulcers. It was the old man. The control-room alley concentrated his bellow and shot it out into the lounge in a blast that parted my side whiskers.

"JONES!"

He wanted me. He wanted me bad enough to come halfway to meet me. He put his arm around my shoulder and gave me the smile of a wolf who's admiring a thick steak. That was for the passengers. With a solid steel door between us and them he spoke his mind.

"Jones," he said—although in somewhat different words—"where in the Galaxy are we going?"

That kind of question didn't make sense. If he didn't know where we were going, he couldn't have given me the co-ordinates of our destination, and I couldn't have figured the warp fields which were taking us there. Come to think of it, I still didn't remember figuring any warp fields.

The Mason babe was there. That didn't make sense either, because five minutes before she'd crowded the first into her cabin. She handed me a course sheet that looked like the one I'd set up on the board a couple of generations back.

"Look it over, Jonesy," she said. "You gave it to us. Remember?"

I took it. It still looked queer, and this time I knew why. It was figured for a full cycle.

The mathematics you use to calculate a warp course is a very tricky kind of thing. The functions repeat and you have to use them within certain limits. This sheet used the whole works.

I told them. I didn't like their reaction.

"Can't we stop?" Mason wanted to know. The old man told her. We couldn't. When a warp field has been created, you can't break it without being kicked into Lord knows where. We were off on a nonstop trip around the circumference of space-time. It might take a lifetime or it might take a couple of hours. It already *had* taken a lot more than a couple of hours.

I looked over the sheet again. There was a chance that with a little figuring I could get an idea of how long we'd be in. Captain Humphreys didn't take to the idea. He grabbed the sheet out my fist so fast it singed me.

"You've done enough figuring," he

shouted. He didn't sound much like a banker now, unless it was one whose bank has busted. "I'll give it to Prentiss."

"You'll give nothing to Prentiss!" the blonde told him. "I don't trust that red-headed valve monkey! What's he doing on a broken-down rowboat like this, anyway?"

"Yes, captain. What is he doing here?"

It was Anastasia again. Her nose was still a little red, but she was madder than she was anything else. "And how did this blonde space-cat get in here? I just left her noodling with that red-headed monkey she seems to dislike so much." Her black eyes narrowed. "Is she twins?"

Twins! I began to get me an idea. I didn't know how or why, but I thought I knew what. I slid around Anastasia and went down the alley one jump ahead of the old man's bellow. I yanked open the door of the Mason dame's cabin. I saw the first with his arms full of a lot of high-order curves. It was Karen Mason all right. Then it was Anastasia. Then it was empty air.

He unfolded his arms from around nothing. He had the unmistakable look of a fool on his face. He had a right to it. He reached blindly for the blonde's bunk and sat down hard.

"G-g-gleeps!" he gasped.

The red book that Mason had taken from Davy's cabin was on the floor where he had been standing. I picked it up. The pages were blank again. I closed it and opened it. It was a cookbook. I tried again. It was full of fealthy pictures.

Gleeps was getting rattled. But did I know that then? How could I? I'd never heard of Gleeps.

I slammed the book into the corner and wobbled out into the lounge where the bottled goods were. The lights were down. The Board of Education had gotten tired of sitting around counting its fingers and gone to bed. I flicked them on. Professor Florenzo was draped artistically across a big chair with a neat burnt hole right in the middle of his vest."

Now we had us a corpse. O.K. Corpses were something you could lay your hands on—if you wanted to. Corpses weren't blondes that turned into brunettes that evaporated into colorless, odorless, tasteless gases. Corpses weren't recipes for *spolluk* fritters that turned into an overexposed picture of an over-developed hussy with wise-cracks painted on her periphery. Corpses

weren't route sheets that turned into round-trip tickets to nowhere. I grabbed me a handful of this one and yelled—loud. And long.

By now they were used to coming on call. In a flash they were all there. The Mason, Anastasia. The first. Davy. The old man. The schoolteachers. The Bascoms. And the corpse. Everyone but Foozy. And the bird.

One of the teachers saw the burnt circle on Florenzo's vest. Her pop eyes popped more. "Oooooo," she squealed. "Death rays!"

Death rays my toupee! There was a gun on the floor by the corpse's right hand. The burnt circle was powder—and a cheaper, cornier brand of traders' gyp junk than I'd seen since I was selling the stuff myself. It was just the kind of stuff some backwoods brainstormer would buy at the corner exchange to protect himself from wolves and cardsharps on a trip like this. So let it be suicide. It was well. It was tangible. It ticked. Only the blonde didn't like it.

Did I say she had blue eyes? They were like Sirius now—hot and cold and plenty hard. Her voice started high and it went higher.

She swung on the old man and raked her fingernails all the way down the right side of his face. Her spare fist went into his banker's bulge and her toe put a dent in his shin.

"You weasel!" she yelled. "You bilge beetle! You double-crossing this and that!" She followed that line of thought to its logical conclusion and wound up with a right to the jaw that folded our captain up like a well-worn bank roll. Then she reached for Davy. The little man took off, with her after him. It was like the dream I'd had.

"You did this!" she was screaming. "You and that double-dealing Humphreys. You made the old fossil talk and then blasted him. You were going to cut me out. Well I'll cut you out. I'll cut your blazing innards out and shove 'em down your scrawny throat!"

Then a lot happened. Her foot hit the gun and they went skidding across the floor together, tangled with the teachers, and wound up in a heap. Davy went through the hole where the teachers had been and on down the line to the crew's quarters. The first and I reached for the gun together and Humphreys reached past our noses and got it first.

And then—and there—the corpse went out.

This time it happened slowly. Gleeps was still a bit confused. He was having a swell time, but he couldn't make up his mind. One minute the corpse was there, and all of us milling around it. Then it started to fade. It got hazy and you could see the carpet through it. Then it started back and got solid again. It flickered like a candle that's used up its air. The third time round it went out for good. And Humphreys dropped the gun.

It sounded like a ton weight hitting the floor. I scooped at it and it threw me. It was a ton weight. Then Anastasia stepped over me and picked it up like a feather. Zip—zip—and she'd tossed it to the first. More zips and the old man was on top of him, one hand clawing at the gun, the other fastened on his throat. I hauled back one foot to settle that—and Mason stepped back into the ring.

I don't know now where she kept that gun unless she had a hollow leg. There wasn't enough covering her at any time to hide it. But she had it, and it was pointing at my breakfast.

"Let 'em fight," she said. "I want to see this."

Prentiss had the gun—but Humphreys had the weight. The first had height and youth—but the captain was hard as nails under the plush trimming. With Karen Mason's gun calling the numbers, what could I do? What could any of us do? What Anastasia did.

She kicked. It was a beautiful kick. It was a beautiful leg, and she used it all. She aimed at Humphrey's ear—and she hit the gun. It went slithering across the room, under all our feet, just as Prentiss hoisted the old man over his head and let him fly.

They came to their feet together. Humphreys snatched the gun out of the blonde's hand and Prentiss gathered up the other on the run. They pressed the triggers together, just as I hit the captain northwest of the knees. His shot spanged twice around the room and went singing down the alley. But the first's gun spat blue fire.

It snapped past my ear like condenser drip. I felt the heat from it. I smelled hair burning. And I smelled roast meat. The hair was mine. The sirloin was Captain Humphreys.

And First Officer Prentiss had a cockeyed little bird in his hand.

The scene needed a blackout. It got it. A door opened. There were Foozy and the professor, arm in arm, staring at us in mild surprise. Foozy cleared his throat.

"What isss happening?" he piped. "What isss wrong with Captain Humfreeessss?"

Let me put it all together for you. Florenzo invents a workable ray gun. He's the kind of moth-eaten worm who would. Foozy, the Martian millionaire, is going to finance the thing and give it to the Patrol as a noble gesture. But Foozy is, no pinhead, so they arrange to get together on some broken-down Cook's tour and make the deal.

Neither is Humphreys a pinhead. What he would do with a property like Florenzo's ray is *not* philanthropy. He picks the Mason blonde to help him—Florenzo is supposed to go for blondes, and I know Foozy does, the moss-covered old fungus! A couple of dollars where they'll do good, and the *Queen* is theirs. *But* the Patrol is no dumber than all the other parties to this little merry-go-round, and they plant Prentiss as first—presumably after the blonde.

Nobody figured that Anastasia would take after the first. And nobody at all figured on Gleeps.

I told you about Gleeps at the start. He's an Investigator—in capitals. He's Insatiable Curiosity. He's a nuisance. Nobody knows what he is. Nobody knows what he looks like.

Because he can look like anything.

Put it another way—the way I think Gleeps puts it. You want to soak up all the information you possibly can about a set-up. You want to sit around unobserved and snoop. You want to look at things from as many different points of view as you can. So if you're Gleeps you *are* those points of view.

I don't know what he was when he went aboard. Maybe he was Foozy's gloves. Maybe he was a silver jit in somebody's pants pocket. Maybe he was a pattern of air molecules. But while Foozy and I are comparing notes and matching drinks in his cabin, he makes himself into a reasonable facsimile of me and starts observing. What better way to find out what goes on when a lot of wacky human beings lock themselves into a steel vault and go skyhooting through space?

This Gleeps is a very conscientious guy until he gets rattled. He's me. I'm astrogator. So when the old man asks him for the ship's course, what can he do but produce?

He don't know astrogating from nothing, but he's me—he's got my brain and my handwriting. So he writes 'em a course. Since he's an amateur, he makes a couple of perfectly natural errors.

Did I say Humphreys and the Mason babe were after the prof's ray? They were, but they didn't know it was a ray. When Mason saw Gleeps disappear she thought it was a vanishing act. She thought Foozy, as my old-time pal, had cut me in on the deal, and that the deal was something like invisibility or a pocket warper that would whisk you out of here and set you down there in no time flat. She set out to "contact" me.

Meanwhile our pal Gleeps, wriggling with curiosity about what's happening in this very interesting situation he's stirred up, picks up his courage and walks in again—as Foozy. Foozy's out for the duration, dead drunk. He *can't* ball up the impersonation. So this time he uses Foozy's shape.

Act Two—he's Foozy. He starts observing again. Climax. I throw us into the warp. Something goes wrong with his control. And he's a zubzub-bird. Anastasia, as a matter of fact, insists he was always a zubzub-bird. She thinks that's his real shape. Me, I know zubzub-birds.

That's how the whole thing went. The plot was proceeding as per schedule, with the little matter of Anastasia's temperament and Gleeps' curiosity mixing it up from time to time. Davy was in the plot. Gleeps started to observe Davy as a pinch of imitation *snitt*. And Davy sniffed him. Curtain, Act Three. He gathers himself together and becomes a book. He's never done much reading, so the book is blank inside. He senses from the first's reaction that blank books don't make sense, so he prints something on his pages. He's had Foozy's brain a couple of changes back, and Foozy is a cook. He becomes a cookbook. That's when Prentiss catches on. They're warned about Gleeps in the Patrol.

Along about now Gleeps and his switches are really beginning to gum up the works for Mason and the captain. Naturally they figure what's happening has to make sense. Then try to figure it out. They start to investigate. Gleeps has lost interest by now, and he's turned back into that cockeyed bird and is taking in the most interesting thing he can find—me and my yarns. Intermission.

Somewhere along in here Karen Mason

started to work again on the first. Gleeps sensed that he might learn a lot by observing what went. The way he reasoned it, he'd learn still more by *being* the blonde. So he was. And he did!

Believe me, he put his heart and soul into that transformation. He learned—and fast—what blondes were for. When we caught him in the act, he got embarrassed. He tried to cover up for Prentiss *and* himself. He became Anastasia, and that was no better, what with her standing in the door staring at herself. He tried the book again. Then he just gave up trying. He wanted it quiet. He became a corpse. What could be quieter than a corpse?

This Gleeps is a painstaking little soul. He hadn't been around for quite awhile, or he'd been a detective story in some former change, or something. He supplied powder burns on his vest, although powder burns are centuries out of date. He even supplied the gun. When the Mason dame jumped to conclusions and people started

trampling on him, he quit being a nice quiet corpse. At least, he erased that part of himself and stuffed himself completely into the gun. He forgot to change his weight and the old man dropped it. He corrected his mistake and Anastasia picked it up. You can follow it from there. During the first part of the fight he had forgotten to load himself—praise be. When he did become the real thing, it was the ray gun that he'd learned about while he was the professor's corpse. Curtain—for Humphreys.

Right about then, I think, Gleeps got fed up with the whole crazy business. One minute he was a bird, squeezed into Prentiss' fist like the gun butt he'd just been. The next minute the bird was gone. And whether he coasted back to Aldebaran 12 with us as a flyspeck on the ceiling or a curlicue of black lace on Anastasia's whiffnits, I don't know. Maybe he stayed with the blonde. I know what I'd have done—but I'm not Gleeps.

Or am I?

The Man in the Moon

By Henry Norton

The queer little fellow had strange ideas. A harmless little man, who wanted light, and a workbench—that grew. He didn't quite seem to fit our busy civilization. Didn't fit Earth at all—

THE time to put a stop to things is at the beginning. It's a lot easier, for instance, to pull up a sapling than to chop down a tree. It would have been easier to spank a certain paper hanger back in 1935, than it was to crush his great war machine in January of 1944.

As Dr. Raven looked back on the whole affair, he realized he should have said "No!" and stuck to it the day Sereda asked for a workbench. But hindsight is notably more accurate than foresight, and the heavens know the little man looked harmless. How well they know!

Raven remembered the first time the little Sereda ever came to Mount Palomar. He had walked all the way up the mountain, and sat down dusty and out of breath on the steps of the observatory. Raven felt sorry for him.

He couldn't have been more than five feet tall, and his pleasant, swarthy face was

marked on the chin by a black, hairy mole. He was completely bald. Not just bald on top—there was no relieving fringe around his ears or neck. He was literally bald as an egg, and his face was round and smiling.

"The sun is good," he said simply to Raven.

"Good and hot," said Raven. A lean, black whip of a man, he towered over the little stranger. "Better come inside."

Sereda got up obediently and trotted into the great vault of the observatory. He stopped just inside the door and shook his head at the gloom. Far above in the shadows, the shining barrel of the giant telescope pointed into the sky like some fantastic weapon of the future. Its two-hundred-inch reflector had extended man's intimacy with space to include islands universes heretofore undreamed of. It had brought the faces of the solar family into easy view. Incidentally, although communication had not yet

been established, it had given the people of Earth a grave respect for the accomplishments now so plainly visible on Mars.

The little man backed out of the observatory and stood in the sunlight. He spoke with the flat simplicity of a child who has learned something by heart.

"Light is good," he said. "Darkness is evil."

"You'll get sunstroke," said Dr. Raven.

But sunstroke was not for Sereda. He sat in the sun all that afternoon, soaking up warmth, smiling his sleepy smile. Only when the sun was gone, and the stars began to show in the lemon-green twilight sky did he yield to the attraction of the lights within the observatory and move inside.

It was mere chance Raven had been there that afternoon. Properly, an astronomer's day begins at nightfall. Not because of the darkness, of course, that factor, important to the naked eye in star gazing, means little to the two-hundred-inch telescope. But at night there's less distortion in the atmosphere, less dust and smoke. Often, fewer clouds. All in all, better conditions.

Those conditions suited Sereda fine. His days were spent in the more or less consistent California sunshine. Nights he spent within the observatory, while Raven and his gifted young assistant, Bob Ferris, went through the endless routine of observation, charting, photography and calculation that modern astronomy has become. He had been there almost a month before he got around to asking Dr. Raven for a workbench. Rather, he amended quickly, room for a workbench.

"What kind of bench?" Raven asked. "What work?"

"Just for some simple experiments," Sereda coaxed. "They will make no trouble. And I will make my own tools and equipment."

Raven was again reminded unaccountably of the grave consideration of children, in which all things are either so or not so, with no stops en route.

"I humored the little guy," he explained to Ferris next evening. "He was so darn serious about it. And it shouldn't do any particular harm. I wonder when and where and what he eats."

"I dunno, but he sure got his bench up in a hurry."

"Is it in already?" Raven asked.

"Such as it is," grinned Ferris.

They went over and examined it together, while Sereda stood respectfully to one side. The bench was constructed from some

plastic metal, rough and pitted, but solid-looking. As Ferris said afterward, it looked like the metal had been chewed into shape. Raven rubbed his hand reflectively over the surface and withdrew it at once.

"Not a very level working plane, Sereda," he said.

"It will smooth itself," Sereda ventured.

"What is it?" asked Ferris, touching the bench gingerly. It had a curious feel, a faint resilience. Ferris had a momentary impression that the bench was feeling him, appraising him, as he touched it. Sereda mumbled something incomprehensible in answer to the question, and Raven announced it was time to get to work as though he were glad to dismiss the bench from his mind.

Trouble was, it wouldn't stay dismissed. The subject came up again next evening when Raven came in about nine. Ferris was up on the platform, and Sereda was in his corner on the main floor of the building.

"He must have polished on that bench all day," said Ferris in amusement. "We should turn him loose on some of the brass work. See how shiny he got it?"

"I saw it," Raven answered shortly.

Bob Ferris looked at him in surprise. It was one of the few times he had ever heard Raven speak abruptly. He followed the direction of the older man's gaze. The astronomer was looking at Sereda's workbench. It looked small from that elevation, and every plane of it showed a reflection, as if light were striking it from every direction.

"Did you ever try to polish a piece of steel, Bob?" asked Raven suddenly.

"No," Ferris said, "I never did. Why?"

"It's a job," said Raven. "If Sereda had used the fastest cutting wheels known—even phosphor bronze dipped in oil and diamond dust—and worked all night with the skill and precision of a machine, he might have finished that surface. Shaping the legs and braces—well, that's impossible!"

"That may not be as hard as steel," argued Ferris.

Raven grinned sheepishly. "That's it, of course," he said. "I hadn't thought of that. I was getting my wind up over nothing. Just the same—"

"Look here, sir," Ferris suggested, "if this little guy annoys you, I'll chuck him out. I'll get rid of him. Just say the word."

"I wish I dared," said Raven.

Dr. Raven would have been hard put to find words for his uneasiness. There wasn't anything so menacing about Sereda. In fact the little man seemed to have a definite

code of conduct. But it was a code based on some odd tangent. It was, Raven decided, like trying to fit the behavior of a highly civilized person into the society of Australian bushmen. He ran headlong into it in one of his conversations with Sereda. Raven felt the workbench was getting a little out of hand.

"You asked for room for a workbench," he reminded Sereda. "I agreed. But this"—he waved toward the twenty-five-foot segment of shining metal—"this is more than I bargained for."

"It's the same bench," said Sereda.

Raven smiled tolerantly. It was easily five times as long as the original bench had been, and along its whole length it gleamed dully. Raven would have given plenty for an analysis of the metal it was made from, yet he shrank from touching it.

"What makes it shine like that?" he asked.

Sereda smiled. "Light is life. Light is good," he said. "Darkness is evil. Darkness is death."

"Nonsense," Raven said not unkindly. "You're just afraid of the dark. It's a common phobia, but you should try to overcome it."

Sereda's wide mouth thinned, but it did not lose its upturned smile. "Light is good," he repeated stubbornly.

"Another thing," Raven went on. "Where are you getting your materials? This table—these tools?"

He supposed they were tools, though he had never seen anything like them. They were many-shaped. Curving, slender fingers of shining metal. Odd coils, luminous and fragile. Stubby rods and queer, transparent chunks. The shapes were strange, yet vaguely reminiscent.

"They are needed in my work," Sereda answered.

"See here," Raven protested. "You seem to have a knack for metalwork, and I'm delighted to let you amuse yourself. But you mustn't interfere with the observatory in what you call your work. What is your work, anyway?"

"There must be more light. Now there is half darkness. Darkness is evil, is death. To destroy the darkness is to create life."

Raven's black eyes glinted in amusement.

"*Fiat lux*, and all that," he commented. "Well, if you're going to abolish night time, you've picked yourself a real job."

Raven didn't stop to wonder how the job was shaping up, or how it was being done. Not for several weeks. Then it was brought

to his attention sharply. Ferris stopped by to give Dr. Raven a lift on this particular evening, so they arrived at the observatory together, quite a bit earlier than usual. The sun was still touching Mount Palomar, though shadows were deepening in the valley below. They sat in the car for a while, watching the sunset.

"That little Sereda is wacky," Ferris said abruptly.

"What brought that on?" asked Raven.

Ferris pointed. Sereda was coming up the footpath to the observatory. He was carrying something heavy, and twice he stopped to look back. He climbed so as to be always on the edge of the sunlight as it lifted slowly up the hillside.

"He's lining the observatory," Ferris said.

"Lining it?"

"Lining it with metal like his bench." Ferris sounded more worried than amused. "He's got one big section of the wall finished."

"The hell you say," commented Raven.

"What I want to know, who is this Sereda? Where did he come from? What's he trying to do? He's doing things that aren't possible. They aren't even human!"

"Now don't get upset, Bob," said Raven.

"And another thing! People down in the valley say things are being stolen, and they've traced it to somebody on the mountain. All kinds of metal. One man said fifty of his chickens were killed, and their hearts cut out."

Raven swore softly. His biochemistry was rusty, but he remembered something about the Lindbergh-Carrell experiments—living tissue that grew in chemical solution. He resolved to read up on it when he got home.

Sereda came over the last turn of the path and saw the car. He hesitated, then walked slowly over to it. He was carrying a big coil of wire that he rested on the ground beside him. He put his hand on the car door, and Raven noticed that his fingers seemed dusted with some metallic powder. Briefly they seemed to be only caricatures of human fingers. "He's taller, too," Raven thought.

"The dark is coming," Sereda said.

"It'll be light tonight," Raven answered, and pointed to the full moon on the horizon.

"Not light enough," answered Sereda.

He gazed at the silvery moon face, and his eyes narrowed to dreamy slits.

"There is a proper orb, one that doesn't spin madly to evade the light," he remarked. "It must be a peaceful, homelike place."

"Like your home, Sereda?" asked Raven.

He held his breath, but Sereda shouldered his coil of wire and went into the observatory without answering. Ferris got out of the car and followed. Raven rubbed his fingers along the car door. Where Sereda's hand had rested, four almost imperceptible hollows could be felt, as though the resting fingers had sunk into the metal. His lips tightened, and he went into the building with the hair on his neck rising.

It was too light inside the dome. Ferris made a wry face, for there was a subdued radiance about the whole lower level, a glow that seemed to reflect from the smooth metal walls. Sereda was not in sight.

"That tears it!" said Ferris angrily. "Look at those walls! I'm going to throw that little—"

He stopped, for overhead the whine of the machines began, the machines that open the dome and focus the big two-hundred-incher. Somebody had started the mechanism of the world's largest telescope. Ferris was outraged.

With a roar of anger he went up the steps to the platform. Raven started to follow, then stopped as if struck, and walked unbelievably to the workbench. Sereda had tossed the coil of wire on it as he came in. But what Raven saw was not the coil. It was a puddle of metal, still marked with looping lines to show it had been a coil of wire, but a puddle of cold, flowing metal that was slowly being absorbed into the surface of the table. He saw something else. Yesterday he had scratched a mark on the concrete floor, to determine the limit to which the workbench extended. It was now past his mark, by several feet.

Ferris' voice floated down furiously from the platform, followed by the chiming tones of Sereda. "What manner of man or devil is this?" thought Raven, and he went up the steps like a shadow.

The two stood facing each other, their heads swimming into view in the moonlight that streamed through the opened dome. The giant telescope had been leveled directly at the satellite. Sereda's eyes were almost closed, and there was a beatific smile on his round face. Ferris put out a hand as Raven came up, and gripped the older man's arm with a convulsive clutch.

"He wants to be the telescope," he said in a tight, flat voice.

"That's all right, Bob," Dr. Raven answered uncomprehendingly. "Let him see

it. He can't damage anything by looking in the viewplate while we're here."

"He doesn't want to see it, he wants to be it!" Ferris corrected, and Sereda's disembodied head nodded in vigorous confirmation.

Raven made a startled, desperate effort to keep his voice even. "That's a big step to take, Sereda. Why do you want to be a telescope, anyway?"

Sereda's wide slit of a mouth opened and he bayed gently. "Crazy as a barn owl," thought Raven, "and I'm not far behind him." The words that tumbled out were mad, stream-of-consciousness fragments. "—glory of the lights that burn in the heavens, and are never dim, and are always bright, and life is in them, in the flow of light from the living stars—" Ferris looked as if he were going to be sick. Raven's black brows made a sharp diagonal across his forehead as one lifted and the other squinted down in a thoughtful scowl.

"Look, Sereda," he said. "In the viewplate."

They bent over the telescope, and the full Moon rode in solemn majesty, seeming at a distance of about thirteen miles from Mount Palomar. The face was at once transformed into mountains and plains; cratered peaks that seemed to reach almost into touch, and plains that spread dizzily like seas across the moonscape.

"Wouldn't you rather be the Moon?" His voice was soft.

Sereda looked at him thoughtfully.

"You could make it shine," Raven coaxed. "You could make it live and shine with light, and all the stars in all the sky would send their light to you."

Sereda bent over the viewplate again.

"No air to cut out the light," said Raven.

Sereda turned, and his head floated out of sight as he walked out of the moonlight and down the stairs. His feet made the faintest clanging noise on the metal steps. Raven turned soberly to Ferris.

"This is invasion," he said.

Throughout the night they could hear Sereda below. An occasional clash of metal rang like a muffled bell. The radiance within the vault of the observatory dimmed gradually, as he made trip after laden trip out the door.

Twice Raven's curiosity took him to the lower level. Once it was to try a drop of reagent acid on a fragment of the luminous metal. Nothing happened. The drop clung for a moment, then the metal seemed to

twitch, and the drop rolled off and fell to the floor. There was no trace or stain on the metal.

The second trip was close to morning. There was no sign of Sereda in the building. Raven looked outside, and saw the little creature had piled his metal and his tools into a rough stack about twelve feet long. He had evidently grown tired, for he was lying across the pile, and in the wan moonlight he seemed half melted into the metal scraps on which he lay. The whole contour of the pile was rounded and streamlined.

Toward morning, there was a *whooshing* noise from outside, and when dawn came Sereda was gone. There was a shallow rounded trench in front of the observatory, a bed about twelve feet long that looked as though it had been chewed from solid rock. That was the only trace, the only evidence that Sereda had ever been there.

Ferris and Raven both thought about the queer being a good many times in the succeeding weeks, but they did not speak about him until the press of circumstances forced them to. When the newspapers began talking about the Moon's strange brilliance, they could ignore it no longer.

Ferris looked up from his calculation. "The albedo is completely cockeyed," he said. It's reflecting about five times as much light as it should."

Raven's knobby hands moved from the wrists in a characteristic gesture of puzzlement, like the working of a claw machine. He looked at Ferris, and saw only the untroubled interest of a schoolboy who has just found an unusual problem for his teacher. He spoke in the indulgent tone a fond parent might use to describe the actions of a naughty child.

Raven looked again at the Moon. "It's like . . . like stainless steel," he said, "or that stuff—"

"Sereda's metal," Ferris agreed. He chuckled reminiscently. "He was a funny little man."

"He wasn't funny," said Raven. "The last time we saw him he wasn't little. And I'm damn near convinced he wasn't a man."

Ferris looked startled.

"If he was human," Raven continued, "he's done one of two things. He's either brought the science of symbiosis to perfection, or established a metalline economy."

"Wait a minute," said Ferris. "Symbiosis is the combining of two life forms, like the union of spores and fungi to create lichen."

"That's what it is to us," Raven said. "We

don't know what it might be to some entity outside Earthly experience. Sereda fits no Earthly matrix."

"What are you trying to do, tell me he was the 'man from Mars'?"

"Remember what he said the night he left? A proper orb, one that doesn't spin madly to evade the light."

"Mercury!" gasped Ferris.

"There was a meteor shower about a month ago," Raven recalled. "Meteors that came from Mercury's orbit. Probably half a dozen struck the Earth. Bob, they weren't meteors." He repeated what he had said that other night. "This is invasion."

Ferris looked back at the scope. "The contours are going," he said.

Raven bent over the viewplate. The familiar peaks and valleys of the Moon were almost gone. As he watched, he fancied he could see the easy flow of brilliance that was making the Moon's surface as smooth and polished as marble. Even through the tremendous eye of Mount Palomar, it was now impossible to see more than a ripple on the gleaming sphere.

He looked at Ferris. "It's supposed to be only a quarter bright," he said. "The rest of it's shining by its own light."

"Look now!" Ferris said excitedly.

Raven's eyebrows met in a black diagonal across his forehead. Upon the luminous face of the Moon, new lines were showing. Not the line of contour shadow that had once marked the satellite, but flat black marks such as a child might draw to form a picture. They were very faint, and he thought they would not be visible to a less powerful telescope than this one.

"See it?" asked Bob Ferris.

"Yeah," said Raven, scowling at the viewplate. "It's complete, even to the wide smile and the black mole on his chin."

"Well, Dr. Raven, that ought to ease your mind," Ferris said. "Your invasion turns out to be a new man in the Moon."

"Does it ease your mind to know there's a creature capable of turning himself into a spaceship and travelling through the void?" rasped Raven. "Does it make you feel secure to know there may be others like him on Earth right now—inhuman monsters that devour metal and change their shapes into anything? Do you enjoy knowing that the cosmic barrier is rifted—that the moat of space is breached?"

Ferris wasn't paying much attention.

"Just imagine," he said. "No more dark nights."

Unthinking Cap

By John Pierce

"You've been very co-operative," the chief examiner told Jeffers.

At least they appreciated his acting civilized about it. And he had been co-operative, through two weeks of mental and physical examination. To him it had been purposeless and confusing. To these men it had apparently been worth yanking him from 1940.

The examiner relaxed comfortably in his chair and looked patiently across the desk, as if waiting for Jeffers to talk. Apparently there was no hurry in 3046, although a surprising number of things happened in twenty-four hours. It was an elimination of waiting and waste rather than hurry.

"May I ask if I really helped you?" Jeffers inquired.

"Oh, certainly. Certainly you did," the examiner replied. "Now, the bacteriologists report that the modification in oreasis has been in line with what they expected. Your physiological changes are quite negligible, of course; evidence of malnutrition, disease impairments, and slight addictions, but minor, indeed. Mental state wholly unadjusted, but capacity completely within tolerances. I don't understand the details myself; my training is purely administrative. But I can assure you, everything was up to expectations. A thorough check."

"But about the past; I should think my historical knowledge—" Jeffers began.

"Waste of time, history," said the examiner. "We understand our own era and have a fair conception of the near future. There's room for improvement, you know; even improvement in the human stock—although that's long-range planning. No observable results yet, except at extremes. You're no different from me, except for training. Of course, a few abnormal psychologists study history as an adjunct, but they already have more material than they can use, and all of it correlates."

The examiner sat idly as if expecting further conversation. Jeffers began to feel quite at ease. He had been too awed by the specialists really to establish communication with them. With this man he was at

home. Different ideas, of course, but like Dr. Johnson in the twentieth century rather than a visit with a superman.

"If you are really going to return me," said Jeffers, "and I believe you are—I suppose others have been returned?"

"Oh, yes," said the examiner. "Many, many."

"How is it," continued Jeffers, "that we hear nothing of them?"

"We can rely on our psychologists completely," the chief examiner said.

"You mean, you can trust me to act as you wish?"

"That's it," said the examiner, "in other words.

"Further," the examiner continued, "you will remember that before the examinations I said that you should not go completely unrewarded. I don't mean just the novelty you have encountered. You may take with you something of value if you wish. Nothing large; the waste of power in transportation is terrific."

"If I had free choice, I'd rather live here a while and observe things," Jeffers said. "After all, I've seen only the inside of a few laboratories."

"Impossible, I'm sorry," said the examiner. "A terrible waste of time. And it would take you too long to assimilate anything. You'd be confused. You have no latent images; no developed classifications, so to speak. You couldn't remember anything worth while."

Jeffers remained unconvinced but silent.

"We'll go to the museum, now," said the examiner. "You may choose something there."

The museum was very impressive to Jeffers. There were no glass cases and no labels. All the objects appeared real and workable. It didn't seem like a museum at all, but like something else familiar. Perhaps, a toy shop.

The invincible weapons appeared truly invincible, but Jeffers shuddered at the thought of using them. He not only hated the thought of killing, but he understood the danger of society to one mortal man, how-

ever well armed. The images presented, though, were intriguing, especially visual and auditory hallucinations, violently incapacitating or, at will, causing complete mental collapse. The device for utter disintegrations, impractical because of its violence seemed trite but impressive.

But Jeffers didn't want destruction. He wanted something that would help him in a personal way, and benefit him financially as well. He was disappointed that there was no immortality machine, or cure-all at least. But, as the examiner pointed out, ailments differ in nature as well as in symptoms. The gold-making machine was attractive, but a little too obvious. The levitation belt was clever, but limited. Who wanted to go flying about to the consternation of others? Most especially if the means could not be reproduced, as the examiner assured him they could not.

Remnants of desire for other wonders faded from Jeffers' mind as the examiner showed him the forgetting machine.

"You mean this is selective forgetting?" Jeffers asked astounded.

"Quite selective," the examiner replied. "Of course, it affects surrounding memories slightly. It disorients the array in memory space completely near the point of concentration, and decreases order progressively less in remote regions. The effects are more diffuse if concentration is incomplete."

It seemed incredible to Jeffers. All there was to it was a black plastic cap, remarkably close-fitting and comfortable, and a slight cord a yard long bearing at its end a button.

"It will be unique in your age," the examiner assured him, as if divining Jeffers' thought. "No one could possibly duplicate it before 2009. That's when limited binding was developed," he added. "Opening the case would merely destroy it."

His mind aswam with possibilities, Jeffers almost forgot to voice his decision. The examiner waited patiently.

"I'll take this," Jeffers finally managed to say. Then, as an afterthought, "Are there other things to see?"

"No," said the examiner. "This is the last."

"It's almost," thought Jeffers, "as if he knew I would choose it."

On the way to the time machine, carrying the forgetting machine in his own hands, Jeffers asked if it was much used.

"Very, very little," the examiner replied.

"But don't you have unpleasant memories?" asked Jeffers.

"Nothing unpleasant happens to us," the

examiner said, "except once in a great while, by accident."

"Death?" asked Jeffers.

"Death is inevitable," said the examiner as lightly as Jeffers might have said that rain is unpleasant.

"But mysterious," Jeffers felt impelled to add.

"I suppose it may be, to you," the examiner replied, with what seemed a faint trace of interest, surprise, or recollection.

"But don't you do things you want to forget?" asked Jeffers.

"Of course not," said the examiner. "Why should we?"

"Why don't you?" Jeffers asked, resolved not to be put off.

The examiner was silent for a moment, perhaps framing an intelligible answer.

"I can't tell you clearly in the time available," he said. "I can say this, though. Would you do such things if your mind were examined thoroughly every six months?"

Jeffers was aghast at the possibility. Then he had a sudden horror.

"Did they do that to me?" he asked.

"Certainly," the examiner answered. "The third room, that black cabinet in which you lay, and the slightly dizzy feeling."

"And do you know the results?" Jeffers asked in panic.

"Of course," the examiner answered, "that is, a nontechnical résumé of the mind content for cataloguing."

Jeffers walked beside the examiner in stunned silence, wondering how a man who knew his every hidden memory could be so casual. Then he remembered the forgetting machine, and realized that he could rid himself of this, too. He felt reasonably relieved. But how could a whole nation of men put up with this?

"It's terrible!" he exclaimed.

The examiner smiled. "To you, I suppose."

"But, to anyone," Jeffers insisted.

"No," the examiner replied. "It's a matter of training. Does it occur to you that to a barbarian, say . . . no, to a savage—" The examiner paused to examine a notebook. "To a savage taxes or traffic regulations or compulsory education would seem unbearable?"

"I thought you didn't study history," Jeffers remarked.

"I don't," the examiner replied. "These answers were prepared by the psychologists as suited to your probable questions. It's time for your return now."

They entered the place of the time

machine, and Jeffers was returned. He arrived in his room after no elapsed 1940 time. He was a little stunned. The conversation with the examiner had left him in a curiously numbed state, with a dreamlike quality hazing the future he had visited. He was glad to find the forgetting machine still in his hands.

Jeffers resolved not to use his treasure in haste. That way lay disaster. Rather, through an afternoon in the park and a long and pleasant dinner at Keen's, he considered ways of employing the gift. At first a flood of embarrassing personal memories occupied his attention. Most of them were not really bad, but merely annoying. How often had he made a fool of himself! Been taken in! Missed an opportunity! That time with the girl— The scene with his first boss. How such stupid things could trouble one in a night of unease.

Now that he could banish them, Jeffers felt a certain roguish delight in turning these memories over in his mind. Indeed, when they were at his mercy, some seemed almost amusing old companions. He would not let them go. But others—and others crossing his mind left him in shuddering squeamishness. How could he have been such a fool?

During dinner, Jeffers thought more of exploiting the machine. A means of making contacts would occur. He had limited time and only one machine, so it must be a purely personal approach, with no advertising. But some individuals should be willing to pay hugely. The grief-stricken, for instance, though many would cherish their grief. And criminals, some of them must have hurt consciences. Or would forgetting interfere with prearranged alibis? Jeffers began to realize that there were difficulties to be considered.

For instance, he must get his pay in advance. After a client had forgotten, he would see no point in paying. Would he try to recover the fee? Jeffers wondered if he could ask what was to be forgotten and then threaten to remind the client. But there was no way of getting the truth. Certainly a man would not tell what he so longed to forget.

While Jeffers sat in his room smoking and letting dinner digest comfortably, the good points of the forgetting machine appealed to him. As he fitted the plastic cap to his head, he resolved to rid himself first of the knowledge that the examiner, and many others in 3046, knew all his mind. Not that it mattered that far in the future. The real test was that it made him unhappy to think of it.

Jeffers reflected that he would know success only in that he would recognize failure. Of course, he could leave a written reminder, but that would destroy the benefit.

He found it surprisingly hard to concentrate clearly. All sorts of irrelevant thoughts crept in. At last, however, he held the memory in his mind and pressed the button.

Jeffers remembered having decided to test the machine. Had he, he wondered? He felt he had. He resolved that he must make a clearer test. Say, choose a trivial memory and leave a written memorandum recording the time at which the button was to be pressed.

The test was successful.

Jeffers relaxed pleasantly, still wearing the cap and fingering the control. With complete success, only choice remained. Be guided by the future; there was no hurry. He allowed his mind to wander freely. He speculated on the machine itself. A queer thing, and what did concentration have to do with it? How did it work? It seemed absurd, the whole idea of a forgetting machine—One of the loud noises not uncommon in cities startled Jeffers, and he pressed the button involuntarily.

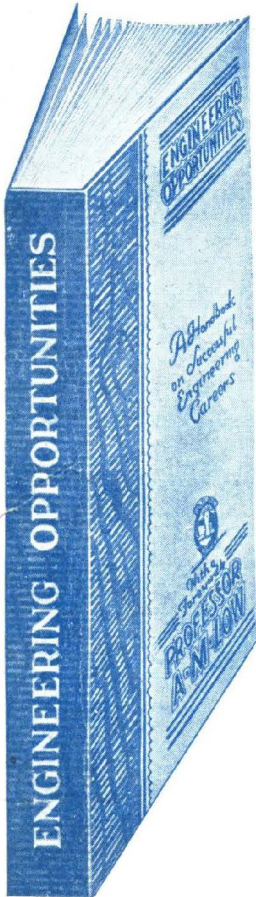
To find himself wearing a queer plastic rig on his head and fingering a button on the end of a slight cord puzzled Jeffers considerably. His mind wandered. Confusedly, in examining the control, he pressed the button.

The utterly unfamiliar cord and button confused Jeffers in seeing them for the first time. He pressed the button experimentally—

Even the patrolman could see from the vacant stare that this was a mental case. That queer cap, now, was probably one of these electrical massaging machines, though why it didn't have an attachment plug, and what a man with a fine head of hair was using it for, he didn't know. But then, the man was crazy.

The examiner would have been uninterested to know that the psychological findings had checked completely, although perhaps a little sooner than might have been expected. The findings always did check; hadn't Jeffers taken the predicted machine and asked the predicted questions? Of course, the predictions had a margin of error, and a certain generality. Had the examiner been asked if this meant a limited degree of free will, he would have been as puzzled as to answer whether or not there are borogroves.

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